

THE · PORCELAIN · LADY

BY FREDERICK NIVEN



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THE PORCELAIN LADY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LOST CABIN MINE
THE ISLAND PROVIDENCE
A WILDERNESS OF MONKEYS
ABOVE YOUR HEADS
DEAD MEN'S BELLS


THE PORCELAIN LADY

BY FREDERICK NIVEN

LONDON
MARTIN SECKER
NUMBER FIVE JOHN STREET
ADELPHI

First published 1913

To
MARTIN SECKER



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THE PORCELAIN LADY

CHAPTER I: BLUE WINGS

As it is with us breathing mortals who appear variously to diverse minds, so it was with the white lady, she of porcelain, who stood over her white reflection on the polished surface of John Brough's table—the table in his flat, not the one in the Weekly, Daily, and Hourly offices.

John Brough, by the way, was a rolling stone who had rolled into a newspaper office one day, and remained there, as it were, in a crack. Journalism is perhaps the only profession that welcomes rolling stones.

As for his white lady of porcelain who stood seven inches high and all ways round was beautiful, with the lines of her pensive head, gracious neck, and sweeping crinoline — for one beholder she was merely her dainty, ornamental, bric-à-brac self. To another she suggested puppet shows ; to another the Italian Comedy, or the Russian dancers.

To Blandley she seemed like Ettie Wilson. To another she seemed like Ruth Winter.

Mapleton Wild, when he saw her, jumped to a conclusion, which was Mapleton Wild's way. He considered that no man not blinded by love could think that that exquisite porcelain lady was the slightest bit like Miss Ettie Wilson. He did not say so to Brough ; but he thought so ; and he quoted a tag of Schopenhauer under his breath.

One of the reporters wondered if John Brough kept her there as an ornament, or as an ideal to keep him from liquor ; for surely no man, he conjectured, could come home a little bit inebriated to such a beautiful creation, not even that sad poet who wrote :
“ I have been faithful to thee—*after my fashion.*”

Sanctley, the head reporter, who came up to see Brough one bank holiday when all the public-houses were closed, with restless eyes examined the room for a possible decanter, found none, looked under the table for a possible bottle secreted there—and then gave it up—Sanctley, seeing the little white lady, said : “ Is that little statuette merely or-r-r-na-mental, or is there some ”— Brough looked quietly at him—“ utility about her ? ”

“ She could be used as a bell,” said Brough ; “ or at least some copies of her are made as bells, with a

small tongue hanging inside the crinoline affixed by a piece of ribbon."

Sanctley turned the figure upside down.

"I see no place to affix the tongue and make it of use," he said.

"No," said Brough. "That one has not a place for the tongue. I would have cut it off at anyrate."

"Oh! It's not the only one, then," said Sanctley, setting it down. "I thought perhaps if it had not utility it had at least the value of being unique, and so possessed a monetar-r-ry value—for there are people, you know, Brough," he explained, "who buy things just because they're rar-r-re."

Perhaps Sanctley was really trying to pump Brough. I don't know. Certainly I am sure that the most brazen, direct, openly cross-questioning reporter of the W. D. & H. (or any other) offices, who carried into private life the inquisitorial manner, and turned conversation, even with friends and acquaintances, into a catechism, would not have cared to say to Brough, frankly and insolently: "Is she there as a symbol, or as portrait of some real woman?"

As a matter of fact there was a woman in it.

The lady for whose sake that five inches of fragile white statuette took on an additional lustre

and twinkling porcelain personality, was Ruth, the daughter of John Winter, by his wife, Amelia.

They dwelt in Maida Vale, London, N.W., in a house over against a canal, a squarely built house with huge gardens (at least, for London) to rear and front. Mr Winter was retired. His money, sufficient to retire upon the interest accruing from it, he had hoarded in Hastings; and there Ruth had been educated.

She had lived mostly not with her parents, but in the house of an uncle (her father's brother)—that is, when not at school. I say in the house; but really she spent as much time out and about with the uncle as indoors. His wife, who thought (perhaps rightly; I do not wish to be controversial) that consanguinity should be more dynamic than personal predilection, was hurt because of his affection for his niece. But she would have been more hurt had it seemed to her a "real affection." Though he was to be seen abroad everlastingly with Ruth, "his own daughter," as Mrs James Winter commented, "was still his daughter, you know." The cabmen on the ranks used to say, seeing James Winter passing with the pigtailed daughter of John Winter, she holding his sleeve, dancing by his side so that the pigtails danced too: "There goes James Winter with his

little pal." From these two comments, his wife's and the cabmen's, you can gather the position.

James Winter spent his life (apart, that is, from those hours of it devoted to business and sleep) in buying old furniture, old miniatures, fobs, candlesticks. Edwin Abbey might have paused in passing to look again, delighted, at the living picture of old James Winter scrutinising a bronze candlestick, one like a Doric column, in a dim and twinkling interior, an interior full of spindle-legged tables, and grandfather clocks, and long-handled brass bed-warmers, and three-cornered cupboards with Dresden shepherdesses behind their glass, and noted, over in a corner, Ruth, fourteen years of age, playing on a spinet. That was an incident that stood out in her life (memory niched it, or framed it), with a charm she could not ever define.

Do not imagine that she was ill-treated at home because you find her straying about with her uncle. Her mother was much better to her than the average Hastings mother to her offspring. When Ruth went down to the sea on stormy days and came home drenched, her mother only laughed. So she grew up with a love of the sea and of old candlesticks and corner-cupboards.

A quaint child. In her uncle's home she pored

over books on costume, and grew up to love costume and be regardless of dress ; so that wise dressmakers used to glance twice at her attire and note this, or that, to adapt ; and young ladies who were wearing the moment's confection, whether it suited them or not, not infrequently looked upon her with glances not like the glances of the wise dressmakers. But of such undiscerning creatures she was generally unconscious ; if she chanced to note them she never troubled to consider the difficult question of whether they were chorus girls or the wives of peers.

All discerning persons loved her, and none could spoil her.

The presentation to her, by her uncle, of a puppet show, and the interest in that show which her mother took, aiding in the costuming of characters, delving out, from some cell in her mind, a capacity—pigeon-holed there by God in case of need—for writing little plays—these were big matters in Ruth's life.

At the age of eighteen she turned her thoughts to the stage ; but, for some reason, perhaps because her well-intentioned mother sent her to the wrong theatrical manager, she did not stay longer than three weeks under the eye of the shaven celebrity who had been paid handsomely to train her. Ruth looked at him one day with such excessive tranquillity,

serenity, sobriety, gravity, that he did not quite understand she meant her quietly spoken, "I shall never come back here again," till she had turned about, departed, and he felt himself forced to boomerang a very loud "Hem!" into the silence that she left behind. Sobriety, gravity, serenity, he knew not. He moved in a world of mannequin people. Public opinion was divided. Some, seeing her go, ran to shake hands with her, and embrace her; some made their mouths into carmine pin-points and drooped their eyelids; one or two said "Bravo!"; several giggled. Ruth dismissed the incident from her mind and went out into the sunshine.

There are other ways of expression in the world besides the histrionic. There are other wheels on which butterflies may flutter, seeing that wheels are essential in this world, besides the Thespian. And though, perhaps, the usage is, when anyone shows any tendency, to profane it (thus: if a man is volatile and has a pleasing voice to make him a tout for bad pills; if a boy shows a love of animals to put him among them in a butcher's shop; if a girl loves dancing to make her a high-kicker), though, as I say, the usage may be, perhaps, to profane tendencies so, sometimes the possessor of a gift may

turn the attempt at its profanation into aid, grow enraged at the meddling and hit ; or grow dignified before it, and unassailable ; and so, either way, pass on unsmirched—and the gainer.

When she was nineteen Ruth received a letter from Cromarty, managing editor of the Weekly, Daily and Hourly Press, asking if she would be good enough to call at the offices and talk over a sketch which she had submitted.

To gain these offices you turn aside from the jostling pavements of Fleet Street, going east, before you reach Ludgate Circus. The side street is narrow. It is generally blocked, in so far as the street proper is concerned, by drays heavily loaded with monster rolls of paper ; and on each roll is a placard which reads : “ Paper for the Weekly, Daily and Hourly offices.” These drays are driven in a roundabout way from the station, by instruction of the advertising manager. Horses, standing in the gutter between the dray shafts, toss their feed-bags in air and scatter corn about their forelegs ; and between their hoofs the leaping, nervous, soot-grimed, blue-barred pigeons pick and leap, pick and leap, or, observing the temerity of the sparrows, cast aside their fears for a few minutes and pick furiously. There comes an explosion from some motor omnibus passing in

Fleet Street. That sound echoes down the side street like the report of a pistol, and the anxious pigeons take flight with clacking wings. The sparrows remain.

Half-way down this street you come upon message boys bending down at the wall, making it difficult for you to pass on the narrow pavement. The boys are gaping down into the basement of the Weekly, Daily and Hourly offices, delighted at the sight of wheels going round, and marvelling at the monster three-deckers vomiting out papers for the people to read, dozen by dozen, so quickly that the gaping message boys see little but a blur; copies of *The Evening One*, of *The Weekly Paper*, of *Lovely Woman*, of *Baby Bunting*, of—— But enough; these are the offices of the Weekly, Daily and Hourly.

It is quite true that over the outer lintel of the W. D. & H. offices, chiselled in the keystone, was the motto, for all the world to see, “ We give you the Best,” while over the inner lintel was the adage, “ Keep down the standard—keep the circulation up ”; but the W. D. & H. office was not a crushing place. Here there was a spirit of live and let live. These two adages, conflicting, actually inculcated a kind of sweetness and light spirit, a half-smiling, half-sarcastic mood in which to comprehend the

words : " Let him who is without sin amongst you cast the first stone."

Nobody need ever be broken on the wheel at the W. D. & H. offices—without his or her explicit consent. There were all sorts of ways out. Here it did not matter whether you were rich or poor, pretty or plain, well dressed or ill dressed, fashionably dressed or tastefully dressed—so long as the circulation was going up.

Ruth was something of a Fatalist, like most of us, and when she entered the offices, after a somewhat tense journey down from Maida Vale (for she was a woman good at the moment, tense before, and worn-out after) she entered happily. The atmosphere welcomed her. Intuitively she felt the welcome.

Perhaps she had been rendered Fatalist because one day, just after the removal of her people from Hastings to Maida Vale, her aunt—Mrs James Winter—had come up to London to see a specialist about " something in her inside," and had been told that if she were not operated upon immediately she would be dead in a week.

" Will the operation itself be risky ? " she had asked.

" It is a major operation, certainly," the specialist had replied, glinting knives at her from his eyes.

“I’ll not be operated upon,” she very definitely had asseverated, had gone back to Hastings to put the house in order, to cover the last jam-pots, recover a worn cushion, titivate here and there in the stucco villa, and then pass away to join her progenitors. And behold, she still lived, happy ever after, singing about the house or making new jam, to go the same way as all the jams and jellies of yesteryear.

So Ruth entered the W. D. & H. offices happily.

Mr Cromarty, the managing editor, began by telling her that he liked the little sketch that she had submitted.

“I am very glad,” she replied demurely, and wondered how he paid.

“Very much,” he repeated. “It shows—you will allow me to say so, as I am an editor—distinct——” she could not remember whether he said “power” or “promise.” She decided, in telling her father all about it later, that it must have been “promise.” Really it was “power” that Cromarty said, but perhaps he meant “promise” and was just being “nice.”

“I’m so glad,” she thanked him soberly.

“As it stands, however,” he began gently, and then fired off at her, “we could not use it !”

He looked sharply at her, and she did not wilt. She merely remarked :

“ Oh ! I’m sorry.”

But Cromarty saw a shadow pass in her eyes, though she did not wilt.

“ Perhaps you will take it back,” he said, as if asking a favour, “ and probably,” his voice rang encouragingly, “ you will find some other market for it.” She took the manuscript from his hand, amazed at the ways of editors. “ Really, what I wanted to see you for was——” He ran his firm ivory hand up his face, felt his chin, for his secretary had come in. She laid some papers on a side desk and passed out again noiselessly.

“ There is some work that we want done for us,” said Cromarty, progressing into the plural, “ and I thought from indications in this ”—he perceived that his hand was empty and that she held the sketch—“ that sketch, that you might be the *wumman* to do it for us.”

He looked so sharply at Ruth that she wondered if he were testing her manners, and pronounced and accented “ woman ” in that way to see if she would giggle. The terrible part of it was that she wanted to laugh outright because of the way he glared, and shouted the word. But there was here, of course, no

testing of Ruth's breeding. Cromarty's pronunciation was faultless, except for two words—wumman and shuggar. The inclination to give one little "tut!" of laughter at the unexpectedness and explosiveness of "wumman" having passed, Ruth sat there feeling a little dejected; for, whatever this frock-coated, black-haired, black-eyed, brown-skinned man was thinking, the manuscript was rejected.

Cromarty noticed the dejected look and guessed that she was really broken-hearted, so fired off: "We think you could write on children's games, children's little ways, and so forth."

"Oh, dear me!" said Ruth meditatively. "Oh, dear me!" thoughtfully, slightly perturbed. "Ah, well, I read the other day in your *Daily Paper*, among the Personal Notes, that Grant Allen" (at the words "your *Daily Paper*" Cromarty peered at her sharply to discover if she were a flatterer) "wanted to be a writer on scientific subjects, and had to write novels instead." (He decided that she was not a foolish flatterer.) "Perhaps poor me need not turn up my nose at writing about children instead of writing costume stories."

"Grant Allen? Oh yes, of course. Grant Allen! Yes," said Cromarty. "But I don't think, if I may

be allowed to say so, that you are the kind of wumman to turn up your nose at anything." He paused. "And of course you like children?"

"I'm not excessively drawn to them," she said a little shamefacedly.

It was a bond of union between them, for Cromarty's wife had presented him, that morning, with twins. It was a proceeding that was to become a habit with her, of which more anon.

"Not until they grow up," Ruth added. "And certainly a baby in arms looks to me like a badly set calf's-foot jelly."

Cromarty pursed his lips together and puckered his cheeks, and his eyes danced.

He wanted to have This on the staff.

"I have no doubt," he said, "that we have an opening for you—to begin at two pounds two shillings a week, let us say, and, after three months—reconsider, if both sides are pleased so far, and then probably three pounds three shillings a week. You will see better by then—and so shall we—what your special forte may be."

"You think I have some capacity?" she asked.

He looked at her and smiled, mute.

"Oh yes—you must, of course, or else you wouldn't have asked me to call."

Very soon thereafter, instead of sitting in the study of the Maida Vale house, inspiring herself toward creation by turning over the pages of a Kate Greenaway album, or a book illustrated by Preston MacGoun, Ruth came up to town daily and sat in a room before a roll-top desk, acting editress of *Lovely Woman*, with a Brussels carpet under her feet, which was pleasant, and a telephone bell in the wall at her back, which was unpleasant.

When the telephone bell rang it seemed to be in her spine. So, at last, when Cromarty was on his rounds one day, scattering *bonhomie* and camaraderie abroad, hands full of letters and proofs, she broke the ice and, timidly, in response to his suggestion that she wore a worried look, told him that the bell rang in the small of her back.

"That's easily settled," he said, whirled round and, unhooking the receiver, gave orders for a man to come immediately and remove it from the wall.

"Oh!" Ruth ejaculated. "I could move the desk. I never thought of that."

"Eh?" Cromarty screamed in falsetto, swiftly considering her slender build. "True—you could have the desk moved for you. But no. This wall

apparatus is antiquated. You will have a desk standard and receiver."

Ruth sat back in her chair and put a hand behind her back and twiddled with the upright bars of the chair, staring at her desk the while, considering that to have a telephone on one's desk, under one's very nose, was terrible also. At any moment it might ring, like a warning rattlesnake.

Why had she not thought to suggest the removal of her desk to the far end of the room and the turning of its back outward, so that she might be far from the bell, and, when it rang suddenly, interrupting her, be able to confront it over the top of the desk?

Cromarty was still occupied in hearkening at the receiver.

"Yes. At once? Oh! Now? Good."

He turned to Ruth.

"There is a spare table in my room," said he. "You could pop down there with your papers if you like, while the change is being made—or go home for the day if the man messing about would worry you—and you prefer."

But Ruth, as you know already, could not be spoiled. And besides, it was now close on four o'clock.

Daily, from four o'clock to a quarter to five there was a lull in the whirlpool of the offices ; or, if you prefer it, the wheel moved more slowly and the butterflies could stop fluttering, the squirrels could step easily, taking breath.

At that part of the afternoon, if it were summer-time, the younger members of the staff could be observed standing upon tables in the packing-room, hanging tin kettles over gas-jets. If it were winter they would turn their attention to the fires. Soon the odour of tea percolating through the building would cause the women to sit back and adjust their hair, look at their hands, comment that they felt "grubby," educe towels from pigeon-holes or from typewriter covers ; and anon the tip-tapping of their Louis heels, in the corridor leading to the ladies' washroom, would blend daintily with the other sounds of the orchestration—men clearing their throats, telephone-room girls wrestling with the junior reporters, telephone bells ringing, delivery motor cars being wound up in the courtyard behind. From the door of *The Evening One* issued generally some speech after this fashion : " When I was at Cambridge I used to spend nearly every vacation with my father's oldest friend, Admiral Dreadnaught, and I can remember him (he was an author-

ity, you know), I can remember him saying to me, ‘ My dear boy, mark my words, the day will come when Germany will——’ ”

It was at this hour of the afternoon that Ruth was wont to turn aside from the corridor that led to the washroom, and ascend, slow and swinging, pulling herself up by the old baluster, to the flight above, the attic flight, where silence and spiders reigned, and one lonely fly buzzed everlastingly against a dusty skylight, droning more loudly than the office murmur which mounted there. Thence, up a ladder which led to a trap-door, would the acting editress of *Lovely Woman* climb with spindly, black-hosened shanks, thrust up the door with slender hand, and pass upward with a final output of strength that taxed her so that she generally entered the loft with a little “ poof ! ”

Time was when, on these entrances, there would be an excited, timid fluttering, a great agitation of blue wings, concert of little “ Ohs ! ” or ejaculations as nearly like the human “ Oh ! ” as it is possible for homer pigeons to make, a tiny excited or warning grunt in their crops. But nowadays there was little of timidity in the cries that broke out when, about four o’clock, the hatch rose up ; little of timidity, much of “ Here she comes ! ”

When Ruth pushed up the trapdoor till it rested against a barrel, set behind the hinges just far enough to allow of the hatch standing open a-tilt, she now found a circle of pigeons round the hatch, came up in the midst of them like some new Venus, latest incarnation, latest, fairest, winnowed by the progressing ages till her name bore a new significance. Gently she lowered the trap-door in place, and then the pigeons waltzed around her, or flew up to her arms, shoulders, head.

She often wondered if anyone in the whole trembling edifice—for when the three-decker in the basement was at work the building did tremble, ever so slightly—beside herself and the caretaker, knew of the existence of these birds. Yet they, too, were servants of the W. D & H. house, received, daily, their rations, and fresh water for drinking, for tubbing; they had their loft swept out for them, also, every quarter day.

Ruth had discovered the pigeon loft. Everyone who sees something without having it pointed out is a discoverer. She had come up to the attics to consult an old file. She had thus won a censure from Cromarty, for he had seen some very old grey dust upon her brown æolienne skirt, and must needs inquire: “What have you been up to, Miss Winter?”

She had explained, and been told sternly : “ In future you send up a boy for you when you want to consult any of those dusty old files up there.”

She had thanked him ; but by no means did she regret her tendency to do instead of to ask ; for it was while searching for the file that she had found the loft. A plumber, upon a voyage of discovery in the top flat, had mounted into the pigeon-loft seeking for a lost cistern. Ruth had come forth from the cob-webbed attic, with the dust-laden and crumbling file. It was encircled by her left arm and supported also by her right hand—for it was *The Daily Paper* that she wanted to see, and a bound volume of any daily paper is a thing of size and weight.

Then an unexpected whirling caused her to look up, and she saw through the open hatch the bewildered plumber enhaloed by a multitude of wings. She might lack what men call initiative in such matters as the moving of desks, ending of irritations ; but she lacked not the courage to come up again next day to the attic flat, to mount beyond it upon that uncertain ladder, gathering her skirts thoughtfully before the climb, and considering that if she fell, because of the way the ladder was set, she would fall not merely to the floor of the attic flat, but to the bend of the stairs that led to it.

Yet did she adventure upwards, filch time that was her employer's, neglect stern duty, adventure up the ladder, thrust up the trap-door, enter the loft that was to become a kind of sanctuary for her.

Now almost every day she came up thither, to crumble a roll of bread for carriers, horsemen, homers. Here she was wont for about a quarter of an hour to discard reality as ordained by the standards of the W. D. & H. house (their standard ordained again by their public). The sounds of London did not come up so high. Only, if the machines were at work, would there be that faint hum in the walls round the loft. The trap-door was sufficient to still the other hum, the hum of the offices. The merest whisper of "reality" came here, to be heard only when the pigeons sat still. It had almost to be hearkened for, and was so tenuous that it could be drowned out by a homer running his coral beak down the quill feathers of his outstretched wing, or combing the wing's under side with a stretched claw.

The caretaker, whom she had encountered once on the attic flight, coming down from the loft, had told Ruth that the pigeons there were quite forgotten.

"Nobody thinks of 'em now, bless you, miss," he

said. "Telephone and telegram and motors and airypplanes have put 'em out of employment."

It pleased Ruth, crumbling her roll for them, and hoping she was not staying too long away, to think that no one knew but the caretaker of the pigeons sleepily cooing up here. There was a great sense of rest and security ; it seemed highly unlikely that her sanctuary would ever be invaded.

CHAPTER II : A ROLLING STONE

As for John Brough, upon whose table in a flat of Lincoln's Inn the white lady of porcelain stood, his life had seemed to be made up of a series of misadventures that ended fortunately.

He was born a few degrees south of the equator in the Gulf of Guinea, off the coast of West Africa, his father being captain of a black tramp ship and his mother the daughter of a missionary who was eaten in Senegambia. The missionary's daughter had self-sacrificingly married the captain in order to wean him from rum-drinking, and it had been a lost endeavour.

It was a tragic matter. There was a great pathos in her praying to God for aid the while she put in her husband's grog little powders supplied by a drunkard who had cured himself and advertised, under his photograph—in many journals—"Does Hubby Booze ? You can Pop my Preparation in his Porter. He will never know." There was a deeper pathos in the result of her husband's discovery of her popping the preparation. He catechised her. He found

that she had been at it for two years ; and he swore by his beard that he had found his grog more than ever palatable during these last two years. Thereafter he wrote in person for the popping powders. Once, off Lagos, feeling very chirpy, he added to his usual request : “ They improve the flavour of the grog.”

John’s mother had been a lady of amazing refinement, very sensitive, with a beautiful voice and a far-off gaze. She had taught her son reading, writing, and trained his youthful ears to hearken for the voice of the Lord, so that when he used to have a touch of fever on the Coast, or of bronchitis in Hastings—after his parents came home from the West Coast to live in a little house called “ The Anchorage ” (his mother had wanted to call it Bethesda, and had lost there too)—he used generally, when lightheaded, to sit up in bed and declaim : “ Speak, Lord ! for Thy servant heareth ! ”

Regarding a print over his cot, the print of a little boy in a nightgown saying prayers, called “ The Infant Samuel,” he became sceptical. His father taught him, as an antidote to Bible tales, a ballad called “ Wee Willie Winkie ” ; and with the stem of his clay pipe (in which he smoked ship’s tobacco and from which the dottle was never knocked) pointing

to "The Infant Samuel," he said: "That's Wee Willie Winkie by rights. He's wearing a nightgown, and I surmise there were no nightgowns in Samuel's day—nothing but togas."

John Brough might have become, with his listening propensities, encouraged through a fever-ridden infancy, a decadent poet, a "sublime mystic," or the prophet of a new religion with rites and ceremonies in connection with it to bring it under the gaze of the police or the watcher of public morals. Fortunately, however, the sensitiveness inspired in him as a child caused him, as a hobbledehoy, to see something fantastic in the sight of his mother praying for the reclamation of his father all evening, and the father coming home "oiled" after the (ahem!) whist club adjourned, finding his wife exhausted, nervous, eager to do her duty to God and man, and feelingly carrying her off to bed to calm her.

Wise parents cannot be too careful. Children may not understand the significance of many signs. But if they are observing children there will be preserved in their memories many pictures. And some day, grown in years, something will happen before them—and up will flash that memory picture again, with details in it wholly understood now, that were, in childhood, only seen.

“DEAR EDITRESS,—I have come to live in Australia but all my friends are in Glasgow, my husband and son and daughter are all in Australia here, but I am miserable without my friends would you advice me to go back to Glasgow where I should be happy as I am very lonely here I may say that my husband and children don’t want to go home.

“A. BLACKWELL.”

She was merely aware that Ettie had returned and that someone else, not nearly so pictorial, stood in the doorway. She glanced up to find Daisy Woods, one of the wrapping girls, fidgeting her fingers together and saying : “If you please, Miss Wilson——”

Miss Wilson paid no heed.

“Someone for you, Miss Wilson,” Ruth commented.

In the middle of the room, chewing a muff, was Ettie’s alleged dog ; and when Daisy stooped to recover the muff it snapped at her.

“Oh, my muff, Miss Wilson !”

“Poor thing !” cried Ettie, looking up. “How he does love rabbits !” Then she said to the dog : “Come here, darling !” Then again : “Come here, darling. Do you he-ah ?”

Then she inquired if he would care for some sugar ; and he left the muff.

to make Ruth Winter feel, if not show, a touch of deference.

She marched into the room she then shared with Ruth and did so with a sweep that would have ensured the stepping back and “ Taxi, my lady ? ” of any flunkey in London. She kicked off her goloshes a little petulantly because Ruth had not yet arrived ; and on the way along from the elevator she had pictured the room with Ruth in it, Ruth turning at sound of her entrance, Ruth already busy, she arriving late, Ruth already inky on forefinger and second finger, she drawing off her gloves as you might peel a banana, and showing hands as white beneath the yellow and soft-lined kid. She kicked her goloshes under her table, threw her coat across one end so that it draped luxuriously, and then sat down to work.

Half-an-hour later Ruth arrived, and was perfectly genuine when she smiled her good-morning and, turning from the peg on which she hung her loose raincoat, said : “ Oh ! You’re spilling ink on your satin lining ! ”

“ I never think what I’m doing when I get down to my work,” said Ettie. “ Thank you, darling. I say, have you a file of *In the Ermine* ? Oh no, you don’t——”

“ No. I have not one.”

looked like who had asked for Maundeville, John Donne and Jeremy Taylor. However, for the time being he told his assistants to let him know when the sailor appeared again. It was, of course, possible that a sailor might get out Maundeville's "Travels" to read about voyages. He might get out Donne's "Sermons," and Taylor's "Holy Living and Holy Dying," because sailors may meet their God any day; but then sailors think that landsmen may—so reflected the head librarian. No! Stupid explanations might be the explanations for the average choice of books. But this sailor! This sailor!

It is perhaps a pity that John Brough got a ship next day and left that port, and, while the librarian waited, was lying across a yard, helping to make sail, the calm channel sparkling below on either hand.

He had the ill-luck to sail aboard a Nova Scotian brig, and, as all seamen know, a Nova Scotian brig is hell on the high seas. He was knocked from port to starboard, kicked down the companionway, pulled up by his hair, too long for a seaman's. At Halifax, when the ship returned there, he made that ill-luck but an incentive to fresh endeavour and ran from the ship. He fell in talk with a well-dressed rogue, one of the great legion of Tramps Royal of the Western Hemisphere, cold-blooded, steely-eyed, and

furtive-eyed withal, and hard of laugh. This man, having liked "the cut of his jib," took Brough upon a personally conducted tour through the freight-yards, showing him how railway cars were built and expatiating on the various methods of "stealing a ride."

It was like Brough to select the one which looked most dangerous and depart westward sitting under a passenger car, with his back pressed against the rearward truck—sitting on a brace-rod about a foot above the ties—sitting there facing the west, the direction in which the train travelled, or, as it is called among the fraternity, "punching the breeze." Little did he dream then that one day he would come to Fleet Street, work in an office, and collect china and furniture.

When he was thus westward bound the train he was on collided with a mud-slide. The sudden jar shook the train from locomotive to observation car, set the baggage car on top of the tender, jerked the three middle ones clean off the trucks and tipped them into a deep gorge. After the jar, the rending, the general terrible upheaval and shrieking had subsided, John found himself still sitting on the brace-rod, his back pressed with intense firmness against the truck ; but the great sky, with a red sun,

wood pavements that are run over constantly, and polished (as if to show these reflections) by scavengers, each armed with a long pole to which a rubber mop is affixed.

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witted to her kin) Mrs Wilson was wont to speak as “ my governess.” And indeed there is a point of view from which this way of referring to her might be considered rather gracious than otherwise, for her sister bathed Mrs Wilson’s children through their youth, mended their clothes through the hobbledehoy and long-shanks period, and, when they were grown-up young people, gathered together their linen for the wash, mended it when it came back, put away in drawers, neatly folded, clothes scattered on the floors, and so forth.

Ettie was the brainiest of the eight girls. She had a great contempt for men, come from observing, very precociously, the life of her parents. She had a contempt for her father, and small admiration for her mother. She grew to consider that men revolved round women’s little fingers as the earth tumbles round the sun, dark and light, dark and light. She half suspected that any woman with any degree of cleverness could bring any man to revolve round her little finger.

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Now John knew that wages for such work were "big"; but what that meant he had no idea. He considered what a sailor is paid, daringly asked what seemed the stupendous sum of three dollars a day, was immediately closed with, and found out later that the standard wage for such work was then seven dollars a day. Perhaps the main point of that incident is that he felt no annoyance at the farmer. The daring it had taken to ask three dollars a day was all he thought of; and he was glad that he had learnt such daring.

Harvesting over, he went farther west, to British Columbia, got work in a silver-lead mine on some high mountain, up near the glaciers, above the timber limit, with a view nigher toward that which God has of earth than most men ever dream of. But the mine was a "damp mine," and there the handy seaman youngster took rheumatic fever, was carried to the little hospital of the nearest town, carefully tended by a doctor who knew how to assist hopeful nature, and pulled through.

In his convalescent weeks Brough took up his pen for the first time. He wrote an account of his Canadian adventures after the manner of John Donne. A newspaper editor gave him ten dollars for it and handed it over to a sub-editor to liven up

the language. He tried his hand upon another article, but the editor said :

“Look here ! Writing is not your forte. You don’t have the necessary snap to grip the readers. If you’re hard up and I can help you, let me know. You’re a seaman. Do you want to get back to the coast ? If so, say the word, and I’ll take this article for the price of your fare and meals to Seattle, and my sub-editor—who is a stuntist of the first order—will lick it into shape. The matter is good, but we want something more ornate and right-there for our readers. You write of your adventures like you were that Old Testament hero telling his spook story about the Valley of Bones, which is a good title, but——” And he shrugged his shoulders and bit the end off a new cigar.

So John came to Seattle, worked there in a saw-mill by day, read in the library at night, waiting for a ship, till at last he grew weary of mill-work, and waiting for a ship, and exhausted the librarian and the library. Or, to put it otherwise, finding the mill-work too arduous after the fever, and the Seattle library of that period not being able to serve him when he asked for books like Maundeville’s, Donne’s and Taylor’s, he tramped to Portland and once again went aboard a grain boat, ending his sea life

a way by which to make a little "on the side," trifling with the returns, tried to look unconcerned without looking as if he was trying to look unconcerned. He began to consider the advisability of being content with salary in future. He recalled a story he had read, the back-page serial of *The Evening One*, in which a detective, who was surely the greatest of all detectives, felt the pulses of a roomful of persons and arrested, on suspicion, two men whose pulses beat fast. He considered that one of the despatch girls had a weak heart. If Cromarty went round feeling pulses—he considered the picture and saw himself stepping forward and saying: "Mr Cromarty, you can take from me me job; but you cannot take from me me lost honour." On top of that came the troubling thought that perhaps he had better cease to read detective stories. They were absurd, and they made him nervy.

"That's a nice muff!" Cromarty's voice broke out.

Daisy, flushing for some reason, turned round and said:

"Isn't it, sir?"

"Oh, it's yours?"

"Yes, sir. The editress of *Lovely Woman* gave it to me to-day"

“ Oh, you will banter, Mr Cromarty. Really I feel I must, if possible, have another room. I can’t stand that—that room.”

Cromarty folded his hands upon a thigh and screwed himself into a sickle shape, as was his wont when he felt that he was not getting what he called “ the guts of the news,” but being offered only, in his word again, “ soapsuds.”

“ What is wrong ? ” he asked.

“ I can’t write there. I shall have to take all my notes home and work at home, I’m afraid.”

“ Well,” he said, “ you know our adage : so long as the circulation is going up you can work where you care, how you care ; supply your amount and have the circulation not only not going down because of you, but, if possible, going up because of you.”

“ I’d rather have another room and be on the spot,” said Ettie, sobering down.

He turned and coldly surveyed her—boots, frock, peeping between cloak folds and spraying out before her because of the way she held the folds ; gloves, expensive ; cloak, same ; chin and cheeks flushed, head at assertive rather than at indignant angle ; hat very, very large ; feather very, very elegant ; feather looking annoyed ! And then he leaned back and said :

a little dubious about an occasional tilting of Brough's head, and considering of vacancy through the far corner of the roof and meeting walls, considering of vacancy there not like an idiot but with a puckering of his eyes.

Very few people on the staff believed that the new man who had arrived one morning had really seen as much of the world as Cromarty's secretary said he had ; for he did not look very wild, not very big and blacksmith-like ; nor did he elbow people to the wall in the corridors, nor did he talk loudly. He had far less swagger than the young man in check tweeds who went out every day with a camera to take topical photographs.

Sanctley, the head reporter, found Brough "a teetotaller—pr-r-r-r-actically speaking." Even Blandley, after Brough had been in the offices a few months, and Sanctley made that criticism, even Blandley, whose strong point was not agreement, had to admit that "Brough is certainly abstemious."

One of the "makers-up" remarked to Cromarty one day : "If Mr Brough is not an imaginative writer, if he really has seen all the things he writes of, then he must have gone to a university first."

"Why do you say that ?" asked Cromarty, for the maker-up in question, though an excellent maker-up,

was often seen leering at, and heard deriding, the journals published by the house. He was wont to say he took home the papers for kindling and shaving purposes.

“Why do I say that, sir ? Because Mr Brough’s articles that he writes himself have traces of merit. And the serial story that one of the proof readers tells me you have put him on to touching up, owes all its merits to his doctoring, is almost worth reading, certainly worth a cursory glance at least, for it contains phrases quite unusual among our Brave Rags.”

The tolerant Cromarty leaped in his chair. Then he changed the conversation on to “making-up.” He was glad to have this hint that he harboured on the staff, and had given a position of trust to, a man who might one day begin insidiously to decrease the circulation.

handed over that beribboned possession to her. She felt so indignant, so chagrined, that she sailed straightway to the room occupied by Cromarty, "the chief."

When he was gone home his door was left wide open; when he was engaged beyond any kind of interruption save the telephonic, the door was closed; when he was within and willing—if not always eager—to be interviewed the door stood ajar. Now it stood ajar and Miss Wilson thrust her hand in, inserted her side, her head, and looked in upon him with: "Oh, Mr Cromarty."

"Come in, Miss—er—Miss, er—Wilson."

"Oh, Mr Cromarty," she said, sweeping in with a whirl of black chiffon and flash and disappearance of white satin lining, "I've come along to see if you could possibly manage to let me have another room—only a little room, but just my own—where I can feel able to write articles."

Cromarty frowned and considered.

"What! You're not feeling neurotic, are you, a fine wumman like you, radiating health? I saw in one of the personal pars the other day—silly things—that some big thinker or another says, 'Never lock your door. When you have to lock your door to concentrate, go out and dig, or cycle or ride.'"

Ruth stepped over and picked it up, handed it to Daisy, looked thoughtfully at Ettie, who was searching in a chatelaine, feeling with exquisite fingers among handkerchiefs, headache powders, pocket-mirrors, powder-puffs, pencils, three-penny pieces with holes in them, for a lump of sugar.

Ruth put on her hat and loose raincoat, pulled down her desk and departed solemnly downward. A man in blue cotton coat was tinkering with the elevator shaft, so she walked downstairs slowly, Daisy, a flight below, tearfully carrying the beslabbered and disembowelled muff.

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Ruth strayed into the despatching-room, and fortune was with her, for it was then the lunch-hour for despatch girls. As she knew where Daisy Woods sat, or stood—for Daisy’s work was mostly done standing—she had little difficulty in putting down the muff without being observed by the office boy and the remaining girl in charge—who were dis-

to use as pipe-cleaners) and suggested burning them under her mistress's nose. At mention of that rustic remedy Mrs Wilson sat up and held the brandy glass for herself, though with a trembling hand. It was a very painful scene.

Ettie Wilson observed many such scenes and pondered them in her heart. There were none, in her family's circle, who looked for such qualities as, discovered in Ruth by The Office, made her welcomed by it. Her people were of that class who understand religion as an affair of chants and anthems. And the sin against the Holy Ghost, Mrs Wilson suspected (in a moment of profound thought, into which she had been startled by the action of an ignoramus in church), might probably be to heap contempt upon the Trinity by rising up from a pew and skedaddling out of the church before the choristers had filed out to rear. She noticed that though the person who did that carried a silk hat, it seemed never to have been blocked.

During Lent (an ecclesiastical season) Mrs Wilson always read French novels instead of English translations, and drank brandy and soda at dinner instead of wine. Of her poor sister (who had run away with a coachman, been delivered of a still-born child, been deserted by the coachman, and then come back half-

witted to her kin) Mrs Wilson was wont to speak as “my governess.” And indeed there is a point of view from which this way of referring to her might be considered rather gracious than otherwise, for her sister bathed Mrs Wilson’s children through their youth, mended their clothes through the hobbledehoy and long-shanks period, and, when they were grown-up young people, gathered together their linen for the wash, mended it when it came back, put away in drawers, neatly folded, clothes scattered on the floors, and so forth.

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décolleté quality of a camisole between mother and daughter, but affected the lowest-cut dinner-gowns. When the Rev. Mr Popular, a famous figure in their suburb, dined with them, she rather relished the way he had of saying he saw no harm in an after-dinner cigarette, and lighting hers for her with a hand fumbling and patting on her shoulder. She knew how to crack nuts with her ivory hands holding the nut-crackers tight, her elbows rigid, her shoulders taut so that the shoulder-straps slipped down upon the glaxis of her shoulders.

She felt her way, considering her gifts, slowly. But after the perusal of several volumes of "Recollections of a One-time Keeper of the Royal Linen Basket," she decided that daring was the essential for success. At the school at Hastings, to which she had been sent, she had been notorious, in a certain clique, for the vivacity with which she narrated little stories that required, for the telling, a clustering close of heads, giggles and glances. She had, indeed, been censored mildly once by the headmistress for telling a story that had been overheard by an undermistress. But Mrs Wilson happened to be in Hastings for a holiday at that time; and the motor car, hired for the holiday, coming daily, with many furs in it (and incidentally Mrs Wilson within the furs), put a

kind of glamour on Ettie thereafter. When, years later, she published her first novel, “ The World, the F——, and the D——,” many ladies scattered about England wrote to ask if she was the dear Ettie with whom they used to learn French and deportment in Hastings.

But before she published that book she came to the W. D. & H. offices and thus into this narrative.

She came to the office shortly before Ruth, but was esteemed after her. The reason for that might be shown in several little incidents ; but the episode of Daisy’s muff, being as good as another, may here be told :

It befell upon one of those glorious winter days that London knows so well—days of slush underfoot, when goloshes appear in the doorways of all alert bootshops, and boys sell bags of sprats on London Bridge to those happy folk who find much joy for one whole day in watching the movements of gulls for five minutes in the morning—upon one of these days when fog threatens, and the soot smudges, taking it for granted, fall heavily upon collars and noses—one of these days on which lights burn all day, and make all manner of effects of gold and grey in the distant chasms of streets, all manner of deep reflections in the

wood pavements that are run over constantly, and polished (as if to show these reflections) by scavengers, each armed with a long pole to which a rubber mop is affixed.

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Half-an-hour later Ruth arrived, and was perfectly genuine when she smiled her good-morning and, turning from the peg on which she hung her loose raincoat, said : “ Oh ! You’re spilling ink on your satin lining ! ”

“ I never think what I’m doing when I get down to my work,” said Ettie. “ Thank you, darling. I say, have you a file of *In the Ermine* ? Oh no, you don’t——”

“ No. I have not one.”

What was the secret of Ruth's calm, unruffled way? It struck Ettie that Ruth would go up to the attic and lug down a dusty file half-way, meet Cromarty, and he would carry it in for her, rating her soundly: "I've told you before that you have only to press that bell and order what you want to be brought to you."

Ettie raised up her head and puckered her eyes, and considered. She wanted the last two weeks of *In the Ermine* for which she wrote the page headed "Lorgnette." The last two weeks would be procurable in the bottom of the building. She, too, would condescend—and perhaps be adored.

Up she rose and passed to the door, and out of her wastepaper basket leapt the dog. Ruth said: "Oh, goodness! Oh!"

"Frightened you?" asked Ettie, looking over her shoulder.

"Yes—I thought it was a rat!"

"Oh, cruel! Did you hear what she called you, Gyp?"

Ettie descended in the elevator, glided forth from it, when it stopped, into the publishing-room, and in her sweetest accents besought the last two weeks of *In the Ermine*. Having received them, and shown her exquisite teeth in the most charming

manner, she passed back to the elevator, and found that it had jammed ; she had to walk up, with Gyp at her heels, he dragging something—she was scarcely interested to examine what, because some riotous reporters were coming downstairs, and she was studiously looking unconscious of their identity, inclining her head graciously to them as a mere bunch that had become a line against the wall, giving her the centre.

Into the room where Ruth sat, elbow deep in correspondence, she came again, carrying the two copies of *In the Ermine* as if they were a fan. Ruth, remembering how she had made a first attempt at doing something upon the stage, and then come to this happier haven, used sometimes to consider that if Ettie Wilson were ever to lose her gift for “ Lorgnette ” pages she might, reversing that movement, pass to the actor manager of calculating passions and make a still greater success.

Ruth did not see Ettie “ take ” this entrance ; it might, had she seen it, have added confirmation to that thought that generally came on beholding the “ special ” poster poses, and loud gestures of her colleague ; Ruth missed that entrance, being too engrossed on wondering what manner of reader could write to her :

“DEAR EDITRESS,—I have come to live in Australia but all my friends are in Glasgow, my husband and son and daughter are all in Australia here, but I am miserable without my friends would you advice me to go back to Glasgow where I should be happy as I am very lonely here I may say that my husband and children don’t want to go home.

“A. BLACKWELL.”

She was merely aware that Ettie had returned and that someone else, not nearly so pictorial, stood in the doorway. She glanced up to find Daisy Woods, one of the wrapping girls, fidgeting her fingers together and saying : “ If you please, Miss Wilson——”

Miss Wilson paid no heed.

“Someone for you, Miss Wilson,” Ruth commented.

In the middle of the room, chewing a muff, was Ettie’s alleged dog ; and when Daisy stooped to recover the muff it snapped at her.

“ Oh, my muff, Miss Wilson ! ”

“ Poor thing ! ” cried Ettie, looking up. “ How he does love rabbits ! ” Then she said to the dog : “ Come here, darling ! ” Then again : “ Come here, darling. Do you he-ah ? ”

Then she inquired if he would care for some sugar ; and he left the muff.

Ruth stepped over and picked it up, handed it to Daisy, looked thoughtfully at Ettie, who was searching in a chatelaine, feeling with exquisite fingers among handkerchiefs, headache powders, pocket-mirrors, powder-puffs, pencils, three-penny pieces with holes in them, for a lump of sugar.

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cussing a serial story in *The Weekly One*, with great volubility, dropping of h's and tagging on of r's.

When Ruth looked at her purse, considering that she had better have her lunch now, and so save unnecessary ascents and descents, she found that she would have to approach the cashier and offer to tender him a slip of paper with the words: "I.O.U. two-and-six.—RUTH WINTER," and an explanation that she had somehow run herself short, or forgotten to put enough money in her purse, or lost a lot—or "something." There was a law against this proceeding; but, like many laws, it was frequently broken. Indeed, the venerable cashier—who knows why?—seeing that he did not ask what Ruth wanted the money for—insisted on lending a crown instead of half-a-crown.

Ettie was out when Ruth returned; but she came back a few minutes after Ruth had begun to disentangle the chaos of her desk, a chaos that had been added to in her absence.

"Hullo! Back again. Fed?" asked Ettie, sitting down. And then, on the door, which she had left half open, came a tap. Daisy entered all smiles and blushes, and cried out in her sweetest Balham:

"Oh, Miss Wilson, thank you so much. I never expected—— I mean I—— Thank you ever so much."

“ What on earth are you talking about ? ” asked Ettie.

“ Why ! The muff you had left for me on my desk.”

“ Muff I had left ? I had left no muff ! What on earth should I have left a muff on your desk for ? ”

Daisy, in search of light, stared at the other occupant of the room—and light dawned. For Ruth’s back, as she huddled over her desk, was a little too expressive of not listening.

“ It was you ! ” cried Daisy. “ Oh, it was you, Miss Winter ! Oh, thank you so much.”

Ruth turned about, her brown eyes very big and surprised. She might have acted well after all, made a success upon the stage. Even Daisy thought then that perhaps error, and not intuition, had made her jump to a conclusion by merely observing Ruth’s back. But when Daisy looked again at Ettie the anger on Ettie’s face—evidently Ettie had no doubt that Ruth was the guilty person—caused her to say : “ Oh ! It was you, Miss Winter.”

“ I hope you like it,” said Ruth.

Miss Wilson rose, slammed her desk cover down and departed, drawing on her cloak with a swirl and a rush. The dog was no longer in attendance. She had met a younger sister while out for lunch and had

handed over that beribboned possession to her. She felt so indignant, so chagrined, that she sailed straightway to the room occupied by Cromarty, "the chief."

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“Are you going home now?” and nodded at her cloak as much as to say, “You are ready for the street, I see.”

“Yes,” she said.

“Well—when you come up again, remind me. I shall see what can be done, look into it. I’m rather busy.”

“I’m sorry,” she said; but there was hope, if not triumph, as she swept along the corridor and pressed the elevator electric bell so that it gave a long, aggressive ring. Just when it was about to become a comic ring she stopped pressing. As she descended, standing in the elevator beside the buttoned boy in blue, she tossed her head up and backwards several times so that the great black plume waved and danced.

But Cromarty, up above, was already on the trail.

His secretary, who had been out of the room during Miss Wilson’s visit, returned and slid gracefully into her chair. Cromarty, who did not seem to have looked at her, remarked:

“You’re smiling.”

She opened her eyes, and then explained with readiness:

“I am a girl of a happy disposition.”

“There was a joke,” he suggested.

“ I don’t think so,” she said slowly. “ Just my natural radiance.”

Cromarty laughed at her, rose, and strolled, hands in pockets, through the office. He looked into the scattered telephone boxes as if they might hold clues. He wandered into Ruth’s room and passed some pleasant, commonplace remark, while he endeavoured to feel the air-waves. There seemed to be no air-waves. He strolled on, with the air of wandering about casually, as if a little jaded at his work and enjoying a constitutional.

As he passed *The Evening One’s* room, going down, he heard a high voice talking to a telephone :

“ Yes—it is very kind, but I fear I can’t manage it. I have already twice put off my dear friend, Lord Sabre, and I promised to see him to-morrow.”

He strolled down to the packing-room. All of the staff there were aware of his presence. He seldom came into their regions ; and they wondered. Some furtive glances peppered him, and he was quite aware of these, but he was not interested in them. Some members of the staff fell conjecturing. One or two wondered if perhaps the managing editor had a say in the preparation of the Christmas boxes dis-embursed : Christmas was not very far off.

One of the boys who had evolved or discovered

a way by which to make a little "on the side," trifling with the returns, tried to look unconcerned without looking as if he was trying to look unconcerned. He began to consider the advisability of being content with salary in future. He recalled a story he had read, the back-page serial of *The Evening One*, in which a detective, who was surely the greatest of all detectives, felt the pulses of a roomful of persons and arrested, on suspicion, two men whose pulses beat fast. He considered that one of the despatch girls had a weak heart. If Cromarty went round feeling pulses—he considered the picture and saw himself stepping forward and saying: "Mr Cromarty, you can take from me me job; but you cannot take from me me lost honour." On top of that came the troubling thought that perhaps he had better cease to read detective stories. They were absurd, and they made him nervy.

"That's a nice muff!" Cromarty's voice broke out.

Daisy, flushing for some reason, turned round and said:

"Isn't it, sir?"

"Oh, it's yours?"

"Yes, sir. The editress of *Lovely Woman* gave it to me to-day"

“ Very nice gift,” said Cromarty, but asked not why it had been presented, strolled on, strolled out, strolled upstairs. On the way back he stepped into the room of the editor of *The Evening One*.

“ I say, Fribble,” he said, “ do you know Lord Sabre ? ”

“ Eh ? Oh yes, rather. Can I be of any service ? ”

“ Do you think you could get us his views on the plan to do away with tartan in the Scottish regiments ? ”

“ Eh ? Oh—well, I have not seen him since the old Sandhurst days and—er—I don’t think I should like, with Lord Sabre, to bring in the journalistic note. If I called on him to renew old memories it would seem rather *de trop*—by which I mean not the thing—to—— Well, the fact is, he is a sharp man. If I brought in the question of the army he would think I had renewed the old friendship for—er—don’t you know ? I have not seen him for years, and duplicity is—or was—his *beetnore*—by which I mean he objects to it——”

“ Oh, but he may have changed,” said Cromarty.

“ Let me consider it,” said Fribble.

“ You might,” said Cromarty, and strolled on, taking a mental note to chivvy Fribble into a panic (if possible) by asking him about once a week for

the next month : “ By the way, have you thought over the matter of pumping your friend, Lord Sabre ? ” But at present that was not apropos—by which I mean that it was a side-issue. He passed on into his room again, but as he approached that sanctum two girls fled out.

He strolled in leisurely, hand in pocket, frock coat tail hanging in a meditative fold.

“ Well,” he said to his secretary, who looked, to his mind, as if she had been “ caught,” “ I expect that is about all till tea comes. You got anything more pressing ? ”

“ No-o-o-o-o ! ”

He looked at his desk as if he wondered why it was not a gramophone record.

Something was afoot in the office. There had been some friction. Yes, there had been some friction. He wouldn't have friction. Yes, there had undoubtedly been friction. The right person had triumphed. So far good. He ran his smooth hand up his face and down his face in a weary gesture. He felt as if he was going to be left in the dark ; and somebody, if he were left, might make a cat's-paw of him.

Miss Winter gives that packing girl—what do you call her ?—Nancy, Daisy—a brand-new swagger

muff. Miss Wilson has fire in her cheeks, a pose like a woman trying to beat down a fair price, and wants to get a room for herself. If he gave her a room——

He wheeled about.

“Have you seen that muff of What’s-her-name—one of the packing girls?”

“Daisy Woods. Yes.”

“Daisy Woods. Yes,” he said. “Miss Winter gave it to her. Did you know?”

“Oh yes, I knew.”

“Oh—you knew.”

“Everybody knows.”

“Do they? How did it leak out?”

“Well, you may be sure Miss Winter didn’t tell; and Miss Wilson didn’t. Oh, but it makes my blood boil when I think of the cheek of that Miss Wilson saying, ‘Yes, the poor dear is fond of rabbits.’”

“Rabbits—rabbits. I’m ignorant about rabbits,” said Cromarty. “I fail to see the connection. What,” he pondered his phrasing, “makes it especially brazenly cheeky to say ‘The poor dear is fond of rabbits’?”

“Why, it was as much as to say that Daisy’s muff was a cheap thing—made of rabbit-skin.”

“Well? I suppose rabbit fur is warm enough

for muffs," said Cromarty, "and muffs are to keep the hands warm."

His secretary sighed.

"You are not enough of a snob," she said. "Money talks, as Americans say."

"It doesn't talk so very loud among newspaper men, Miss Royston; at least, not among themselves, in their own lives."

He sat down and turned his swivel-chair about as children delight to turn music-stools round while sitting on them.

"Well, I think," said Miss Royston, and with a stress upon the "I," "that if I had a dog in the office, and it chewed up anybody's muff, I should apologise—and at least offer to buy a new one," with emphasis on the "offer."

"Yes," said Cromarty.

A boy came in carrying a teacup and presented it to Mr Cromarty. Cromarty bowed in the direction of his secretary, and the boy said, "Yes, sir," and put the teacup on Miss Royston's table—all of which was a daily ceremony. Miss Royston nodded to both, took the additional lump of sugar out of the saucer, walked over to the window, opened it, laid the lump of sugar on the sill, closed the window, and returned to her chair—which was also a daily ceremony.

Then Cromarty raised his feet from the floor, swirled his chair round, and they watched the cloud of sparrows play havoc with the lump of sugar.

“ Daisy didn’t make any protest ? ” he asked.

“ No—she was too overawed, I suppose. Didn’t know what to say when Miss Wilson said, ‘ He is fond of rabbits ’ ; the silly cried—blubbed—silly ! Because she’s poor ! ”

“ It was,” he smiled, and put his head back and laughed, “ it was a very diabolically witty phrase.”

“ Witty ! ! ”

“ I think so.”

“ I must go and wash,” said Ethel Royston, looking at her hands. She took the teacup out of the saucer, looking grimly at it, set it on the table, put the saucer a-top to keep the tea warm, and drew forth a towel from her drawer.

When she had gone, with a flap of her skirts that may have implied a thought in her mind that Cromarty was unfeeling, he took the receiver off the standard, and said :

“ Jobbing department.”

.....

“ That you, jobbing ? That you, Hennessey ? ”

.....

“ Oh ! You, Tom ? ”

.....

“ Set up at once—same size as the ‘ No Smoking ’ bills—‘ No Dogs Admitted.’ ”

.....

“ Yes. ‘ No Dogs Admitted.’ ”

.....

“ Ha ! Ha ! No—just dogs ” (and, *sotto voce*, “ Old Tom’s getting familiar ”).

.....

“ Yes. And have twenty-five copies on my desk just as smartly as the jobbing department knows how.”

And that was how Ettie Wilson discovered that she too had in her, somewhere beneath her laced camisole and patterned corsets from Paris, the certain qualities essential in the W. D. & H. offices, indeed in Fleet Street generally.

No—it was not that she learnt thus to pretend to the possession of them. Perhaps I am too kind to her. Perhaps my readers may think she only pretended to them. But I don’t think so. The bills were up for a week. The observation she made that she was treated not one little bit differently by anybody during that week did her good. She did not go to Cromarty to refer again to getting another room,

a room to herself. As the week went on she looked happier. She spoke more frankly to people. She posed and tossed her head and made the great black plume wave just as of yore, spirit unbroken. But she had learnt something. When other people were speaking to Cromarty she did not behave (to them) as if she thought she should really be seen first.

At the end of the week she was discussing a series of articles with Cromarty. It was at the tea-hour. His secretary was out at the time, and the usual bow of *place aux dames* was directed to Miss Wilson in the absence of Miss Royston.

“ Oh, that’s your tea,” she said.

“ That’s all right—I’ll get another cup. Boy, bring me another.”

“ Yes, sir.”

She sipped the tea, standing by his desk while he considered the series of titles that she had drawn out. The matter came to an end—and the tea. She took from him the slip of suggestions marked now with crosses opposite the subjects he considered worth taking up. Then she turned to go.

“ Oh, by the way,” said he, “ about a week ago you came to me—what was it about ? What was it again—your room draughty ? ”

“ It’s quite all right now,” she said. “ I think I

must have been in a bad mood. I'm sorry I suggested——”

“Never mind—you do the ones crossed. They're quite the thing.”

He turned to his desk.

“Clever girl,” he thought. “I'll have those notices taken down.”

CHAPTER IV : DISCIPLES OF DICKENS

HIGH up in the offices, in a room full of reference-books, John Brough sat writing at a table, and over against him, at the same table, sat another man, a little, bald-headed man, somewhat like a sparrow, with waxed moustaches and grim chin. He was a decent little fellow ; so everybody said. When flies alighted on his bald head he swore as he flicked them off, then laughed at himself for swearing. Blandley was his name.

There he sat writing, with one hand scratching his neck, and smoking hard with his mouth, and fidgeting with his feet. He was in labour. He was writing a serial story. With the first paragraph he wrote, after he had passed the usual meteorological commonplaces with Brough, and taken the cap off his fountain pen, and laid it down, and then hunted for it, muttering : “ Where the dickens have I put the cap of my fountain pen ? ”—with the first paragraph, I say (to recover from a parenthesis in the manner of Charles Dickens, the world’s greatest serialist) he began to scratch himself.

His father had eaten too much pork, and Blandley paid.

With the second paragraph he grew more irritable—at least any chance observer might have been excused for thinking he was irritable. I daresay Blandley was irritable; but a doctor, who had told him that his pork-eating father was to blame, and had advised him to eat fresh fruit and avoid tobacco, had helped him to bear. So Blandley's irritability was like a quiescent volcano's. He may have felt irritable, but if you interrupted him he collected himself, blinking a little, then smiled and said, "Yes?" ever so sweetly.

He scrawled on now at great speed. Suddenly he laughed gaily. It was Brough who snapped.

"You break my continuity," said Brough, without looking up.

Blandley raised his head and blew through his nose, seemed, as it were, to waken from a trance; then he bent forward again, looking stunned. His pen scratched the paper afresh and he his left leg, reaching down it desperately all the way to his ankle, till his head was just a grey bubble level with the desk; his left palm now turning up his trousers and the fingers scratching in under his boot uppers, as if their constriction annoyed him. His eyes, at the

same time, were bulbously intent in watching the mad haste of his writing hand. His waxed moustache ends stood up like angry quills.

Both he and Brough smoked hard—in a sense. Brough lit a cigarette, took one puff, laid the cigarette on the table beside him with the lit end projecting. When he smelt the first acrid odour of burning table varnish he paused to move the cigarette a little, so that the burning end should again project, first giving it one draw to keep it evenly alight. When it was too short to allow of it resting there without burning the table-edge he tossed it over his shoulder into the grate and lit a fresh one to take its place. The life of each cigarette was just the seemingly useless, aimless life of its predecessor, and Brough cast on each, at intervals, an anxious eye (there are people who might wonder what on earth he smoked for—if that can be called smoking at all), such an eye as the nursemaids, who gained some anodynes from life's woes from his engaging serials, would cast upon the perambulator while they sat reading in Kensington Gardens.

Blandley smoked a pipe—or rather kept lighting it. A small woodyard of spent matches always lay round him after an hour's work.

Half-an-hour passed—another—and all the time

Blandley was employed in lighting matches and scratching out an instalment, and scratching himself, simultaneously. An hour passed, and he leapt up, poked the fire, glared at Brough as if he thought that Brough should have seen its wavering state, put on coals with satanic vigour, smiting the last lump furiously as if he were slaying his villain in the last instalment.

But Brough wrote on unheeding.

Blandley cast a furtive glance at him, suddenly observed that he was engrossed, and tiptoed back to his chair so as not to disturb him, loosening the bottom button of his waistcoat. He lit his pipe magnificently, as if he meant it for once, standing beside his great-backed chair with his sturdy little legs braced back, his elbows extended, his two hands at the pipe, right hand lightly holding match, left hand ramming down the burning weed, waistcoat now open, top button in the manner of negligent men, bottom button in the manner of Eton. He blew great clouds until he was nearly invisible, and then sat down abruptly again to his work, covering page after page with his little scrawling caligraphy.

When Brough laid down his pen two and a half hours later, and flopped back in his chair, the creak

of the sudden movement brought Blandley, startled, out of his scrawling, and he regarded the interrupter with vacant eye.

“What ! Done ? ” he exclaimed.

“No, no ; not quite. Just considering the *grand finale*.”

“Oh ! ”

Blandley thereupon returned to his toil ; so did John Brough to his ; and the scraping of their pens went on determinedly and madly—also the striking of matches, punctuated by sniffing, all with the ceaseless hiss of the gas flare for an undertone, for it was a grey day.

At last Brough rose, stretched his arms in air, pulled down his waistcoat that during these parturient agonies had rumped up, all creased by the long bending over the table. He shook down his trousers that had also worked up in the long wrestle with the story, looked up to the smoky ceiling and said :

“God be merciful to me, a sinner—but, on the other hand, this may ease their heart, allow them, for a brief space, to forget the imminent rent day.”

Blandley heard his colleague’s movements, if not his quiet words of invocation, and his head jerked lower, his hand travelled faster, his face grew redder.

He muttered: "Half"—scratch, scratch—"a minute"—scratch, scratch—"please."

Brough sat down, then abruptly plunged again into work.

"Thought you had finished," said Blandley, glancing up.

"Not quite! Nearly!"

A little more unanimous scratching, and then Blandley laughed a great jolly laugh, which set him coughing, because he smoked too much. Brough raised his head, smiled in return, and both sat back and stretched their legs under the table.

"Well," said Blandley, "what's yours?"

Brough looked at his paper, and read:

"'And just then a quick, furtive, sinister step sounded in the abysmal darkness of the corridor to rear. He looked incontinently round, his scalp chilled with consternation, and caught the glimmer of something bright in the darkness—an upraised hand, and in the hand something that glittered. It was the steel-blue blade of a knife. To be continued.'"

"Oh, now! I wanted that!" Blandley yelled.

"Did you?" said Brough.

"It is absolutely essential to me. I can see no other way," said Blandley.

“I’m at a deadlock too,” said John Brough.
“Still, I might——” He paused.

“I’ll toss you for it !” cried Blandley.

They tossed, Brough very solemn, Blandley very eager, for the knife “curtain ”; Blandley lost, and so Brough went across to his side of the table and bent over him and helped him to patch up a “curtain.”

“That’s the very thing !” they cried at last, and stood up and laughed hilariously like two roosters crowing to the ceiling.

These signs of exultation over, Blandley touched a bell in the wall, fell into a brisk quarter-deck walk to and fro for a spell, and then broke out :

“Don’t you believe any rot about literature and art ! Don’t you believe any rot about genius ! A genius is a man who demands that you respect his individuality and allow him to ignore yours. That’s a genius.” John Brough bellowed with joy. “You be a workman, an honest workman, as you are ! Take a pride in your work. Here is art—writing these serial stories for the common people—factory girls, servants—to amuse them ; that is what art is for. Dickens ! Charles Dickens was a serial story writer.”

“My drivell is art, is it ?” said Brough. “It makes me sick to see it in the papers.”

“Nonsense ! Your serials are splendid. It is mere affectation of you to pretend an admiration for such things as the work of that Irishman I heard you talking about the other day—what you call him ?—that Irishman who writes about hounds with one ear and so forth ? ”

“ I forget,” answered Brough, smiling.

Blandley glittered, aware that Brough had not forgotten, but retorted, for argument’s sake : “ Quite so. Have a fill,” and he held out his pouch. “ These cigarettes ! Joss sticks.”

Brough filled his pipe, still smiling, because he recalled other terms of opprobrium used toward cigarettes on the high seas.

A boy entered, swathed in a long apron, and with a dirty face and blackened hands, grinned, held out a hand, and Blandley piled all the amalgamated copy on it.

Then the door opened suddenly and Cromarty, the chief, entered, his waggish mouth under his neat black moustache seeming even more than wontedly waggish, the tiny ends of the moustache waxed as if he was going to dinner at the Savoy with the proprietor.

“ Good-evening, boys,” said he.

“ Good-afternoon,” said the two.

Mr Cromarty advanced with a copy of the current *Lancashire Lass* in his elegant little hand. He laid it on Brough's desk, and—

"This has been very good," he said, "since you have been responsible for putting it to bed. But you've made a horrible blunder this week."

"What have I done?" said Brough.

Blandley looked up quickly. He wondered if here were jest or seriousness. Then the recollection of a duty came to him.

"My congratulations," he cried out, rising, and bowing, and then took a fit of coughing with the exertion.

The chief whirled round on him.

"Beastly nuisance," said he.

"What is it all about?" asked Brough, meaning the aside.

"Didn't you see it in *The Daily* this morning then?" said Blandley. "He's had twins."

"The wife has," said Cromarty. "Beastly nuisance. Thanks for congratulations."

"I didn't see," said Brough absently. "I beg your pardon. I never read the papers."

"What!" The chief leapt round upon him now, forgot all about the nuisance, forgot the congratulations, forgot *The Lancashire Lass*.

Blandley roared with laughter, then held his stomach and moaned, while Cromarty and Brough wondered if it was yet necessary to clap his back.

"Well," said the chief, when the coughing became only spasmodic, thinking evidently that Brough had been chaffing and not serious about "the papers," and had scored one point, "here we are," and he proceeded to turn over the pages of *The Lancashire Lass* on Brough's desk.

"Ah, yes," he said, "here it is. Why did you put that in?" and he pressed the point of a plump taper forefinger on the page at two stanzas of poetry.

Brough looked thoughtful, head sidewise.

"To fill up the end of the page," he explained, in a dry voice.

"But why that?" requested the chief.

"Because it is eight lines and two spaces," said Brough promptly, and as if unable to conceive why he should be required to make so obvious an explanation.

"But, good heavens! man, there is more than space to consider!" said the chief. "Did you read it?"

"I have read it many times in my life," said Brough. "Dear old Goldsmith's 'When Lovely Woman stoops to Folly.'"

“And what do you think of it?” asked the chief. Brough looked up at the condemnatory eye over him. And Brough looked puzzled.

“Who wrote it?” asked Cromarty.

“Goldsmith,” said Brough. “Oh yes, I see—I should have put his name at the end; but the space—er——”

“Goldsmith!” said the chief wonderingly. “Is he on the staff?”

Goldsmith would have enjoyed it, to say nothing of Boswell.

Brough glanced up again at the eye of his chief to see if it played traitor to banter. But no—it was serious. It was growing more serious. It would soon be indignant. Brough looked across at Blandley, but Blandley was expressionless, puffing at his pipe.

“No,” said Brough politely. “Goldsmith who wrote *She Stoops to Conquer*!”

“Oh! A dead man!” cried the chief. “Would you read it now, please?”

Brough considered the paper and remained silent. He opened his lips, then closed them. He could not read. The atmosphere was against him. The chief, seeing his hesitation, brought an end to the torture of the innocent.

“Look at the first line!” he cried, “the very first

line. ‘When Lovely Wumman stoops to Folly’—you know, well, it’s *bad*. What do you think yourself of a man who would put that in a paper for innocent factory girls and servant girls? What would they think? What would their soldier sweethearts think? The very first line is indelicate. You must not (as the proprietor says) *alienate* your readers.”

This was evidently an office joke. The chief knew better than that.

“As for the second verse,” said Cromarty, growing stern again after that side jest at the illiteracy of the Aladdin of the place, or less stern than pained to the point of indignation, or righteous anger; and he read:

“‘The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom, is—to die.’

Can’t you see that it’s a direct incentive to suicide?”

Brough sat stunned. He collapsed, broken.

“That’s all right,” said Cromarty, in a forgiving tone. “Don’t take it to heart too much. Don’t take it too keenly. I know your heart is in your work. But just be careful of these little things in future. If you want a ‘fill-up’—mark you, I have

no objection to poetry—a poetry ‘fill-up’ looks very well here and there, but use your discretion, sir, use your God-given gift of discretion. If you want a ‘fill-up’ get something pleasing. At the moment I cannot remember an example; but something to the effect of ‘Jenny at the Garden Gate,’ or ‘The Daisies in the Hedge’—or something to that effect—innocuous, pleasing poetry.” He paused. “You will never do such a thing again, I hope, just when we are all getting such confidence in you—and the circulation is going up so well.”

“Circulation up again?” asked Blandley.

Cromarty wheeled.

“Rather—turned the four hundred thousand this week,” he said, and pursed his lips over that morsel of news.

He stood a moment, and then beamed.

“Good-night, gentlemen — good-night. Sleep well—don’t worry too much,” and he was off.

“There goes,” said Brough, “one of the finest editors and the decentest souls in Fleet Street—but oh, my holy aunt!”

“He is a very successful man,” said Blandley, which might have ended it.

But Brough, having risen to the point of admiring the chief despite his incapacity to appreciate Gold-

smith's lyric, was now pathetically alone. Blandley's little nasal puff made more intolerable to him the room in which he had beheld Goldsmith so deliberately jockeyed. It was to be made more comically intolerable still by the arrival of a bunch of letters, deposited on his desk by the young lady whose duty it was to pigeon-hole correspondence for the various editors and assistant editors and unload it upon them on stated days.

He thanked her with a bow for the letters, with a smile for her commiserating expression, and began to look over the choice assortment. And this was what he read :

“ DERE SIR,—i hope you will be able to giv me the name of some drug what would put pigeons to sleep i keep pigeons and wants to play with them also could you tell me if it is possible to mesmorise a person without them having to giv there sancting also could you plesse tell me if the punishment for rape is very strong in england if you are found.”

“ DEAR SIR,—I don't know how i can't win a prize mine is as good as them you had.”

“ Do you mean to answer that letter I sent you the other week with a stamped addressed envelope

enclosed, or do you wish to show how mean you can be, beside being a set of mean frauds if no answer is forthcoming I shall stop the sale of *The Lancashire Lass* as far as I can by having it published in other papers and showing you up."

"DEAR SIR,—I am a weakly reader of *The Lancashire Lass* and hope you will be kind enough to forward a prize to me as I am in need of the money been out of work."

"DEAR SIR,—I am a reader of your book could you tell me in the book what shop I must go in to get a pair of tweezers."

"DEAR SIR,—My brother has just died. He has taken out a watch from a Jew on the instalment principal. Is it legal for me to keep the watch? If so please say if perhaps I could even have the law on the Jew to get back the two instalments my brother paid to the Jew and keep the watch."

"DEAR SIR,—I see you have not the Decency to write after I have wrote 2 letters that is the Act of a *gentleman* surely. Well, if I can't get what is due to me I must try and see what I can do to knock your publication down, in Leeds at anyrate, and I am

extremely *pleased* to say I have persuaded 9 customers to change their books instead of taking *The Lancashire Lass* or *In the Ermine* or *Lovely Woman* Etc and I shall do you further harm. I shall put it in all the Leeds papers this week end and I shall put it in all the Birmingham papers on Monday and I may say this is the 3rd time I should have had a share of your prize, the 1st time I had to go in a special competition, the 2nd I had the misfortune to lose my counterfoil but I kept the paper of the 3rd and then got nothing. I am well known in Leeds and I am certain I can persuade people not to take your papers as they are nothing but Dam frauds, and then in Summer I shall put your paper in my window warning visitors about your dishonest practices. You might think now that the competition you had is nearly at an end you don't care, but you must not think that as I shall start it again next big competition you have if God Spares me. I usually sell a lot of your publications but I have not sold 1 this week. I shall make it cost you £5 before I've done. As soon as Christmas has turned You will find yourself in the county Court here in fact my solicitor has it in hand now but I shall have a little more money after Christmas. You will always find a Leeds man honest and you

dare not try it on in Leeds. I shall write to our M.P. and see if I can't get your Competitions stopped. I write you a civil letter at 1st and you treat me with Contempt. I shall keep writing up till I get some satisfaction. Please buy the Birmingham and Leeds papers on Monday and see for yourself."

He had grown so habituated to such letters that he did not laugh. When I tell you that John Brough was not devoid of humour you will understand how crushed he felt.

"There's number one," he said, lifting the letters, "wanting to perform a brutish rite upon some lady not amenable to the wonted winning phrases to attain that end. Mesmerise pigeons!" he scoffed. "Here's number two railing against Fate, instead of playing the man in hours of disappointment. Here's number three trying to intimidate. Here's number four"—he glared at the letter—"groveling," he cried, "poor devil! Here's number five——" And not till then, so much was the Black Dog on him, did laughter come to his aid. But it came now and he laughed gaily. He took up number six and glanced at it again.

"There's a 'simple human emotions' person!" he snorted. "I shall write to him. I shall say that

he is meaner than even his conception of a Jew. And he underlines the word Jew all the way through. Jesus was a Jew as well as Shylock."

"Good life!" cried Blandley, "you must not write to readers like that. You must keep up the circulation—keep up the circulation—and again keep up the circulation."

Brough stared.

"And you are an undergraduate of Oxford," he said.

Blandley wilted as if Brough had hit him fair and square with his fist, and Brough saw the wilt and thought that to apologise would only make things worse. The correspondence, the Goldsmith, this—they weighed heavily on his heart.

He bent to his desk and read another letter, missed before :

"DEAR SIR,—I have always considered that it was the aim of Editors of Magazines and Periodicals to endeavour to please and interest all classes of their readers and especially not to encroach upon their Religious or other feelings. It is consequently with much surprise and astonishment that I read the story in *The Lancashire Lass* by Walter Wendover. There is no doubt that a very large percentage of your

readers are Members of the Roman Catholic Church, and therefore it does not seem policy on the part of an Editor to publish a story which, although untrue and absurd, is intended to pour ridicule and contempt on to the Religion of a large number of his supporters. I have been a constant reader of the paper for a considerable time, but a story of this kind is likely to cause one to hesitate before taking in a book where so little discrimination is shown in the nature of the stories published. Yours faithfully,

“ ‘ CATHOLICUS.’ ”

He sat back, after perusing that letter, and then broke out :

“ Yes—it is the aim of editors to please. What a sycophantish business is life—for, my dear Blandley, I am not such a fool as to imagine that there is any man who can escape, in any profession, the tangle that we have woven round ourselves through the years.”

Blandley nodded.

“ Thanks,” he said.

“ A tangle made through compromise,” said Brough. “ Compromise, compromise, and again compromise. Confound compromise ! Some day I must be faithful, answer my fools of correspondents

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according to their folly and get the sack from my proprietors."

"What would you do then?" asked Blandley.

"Time enough to tell then," Brough replied. "Faith without works is dead. And I've got such a little, little, little while to live, Blandley," and he buried his face in his hands.

"What do you mean?" Blandley cried. "Got a malady?"

"We all have," said Brough; "three score and ten and the comedy is played. And when I think of all the world with the sea breaking round it, men to be seen pearling off Queensland; Terra del Fuegians coming out in their little canoes with a fire alight in the bottom; sailormen on the deck putting about on a fresh tack beating down the world from Portland, Oregon; cow-punchers coming into Glendive hotel with spurs jingling—oh no, no! What did I ever read Maundeville, and John Donne, and Jeremy Taylor for?"

"Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galere?" asked Blandley. "What did they do for you?"

"They brought me here," said Brough.

"The more fool you," said Blandley.

"The more hell mine," said Brough, and rose.

He thought of leaving the office immediately,

taking train to Edgware, and crossing the fields to Goldsmith's Oak, to sit under it and tinker himself—and tell Goldsmith all about it, perhaps, and laugh over it all with the droll, dead Irishman. But it was already growing dusk, four o'clock of a winter's day. He could not be out there before night had fallen. Blandley continued to ruminate and sniff. But Edgware suggested to Brough a flight of pigeons that he had watched for a good hour when last he went out thither to behold green grass and the grand trees of that part; and the thought of that sight, always solacing to a jumpy mind because of its sweep and rhythm, recalled to him the pigeons close at home here—over his head.

He would go up and feed them. It would still be light enough up there to see the green and blue and purple changing and blending elusively on their breasts. Besides, it was quiet in the pigeon-loft. Stale smell of feathers and corn and disturbed dust had been, upon more than one occasion, as he pressed up the hatch and entered, dearer to his nostrils than any perfumes of Arabia.

CHAPTER V : MAINLY ABOUT PIGEONS

MISS RUTH WINTER had doubtless heard the opinion expressed by Cromarty, Blandley, Sanctley and others, that John Brough was not a bad sort, but as mad as a hatter. Yet she did not scream when the trap-door rose upwards and his Quixotic head appeared in the aperture. The little "Oh !" that broke from her little mouth was scarcely louder than the alarmed "Ohs !" of the pigeons.

Up he came, scrambled to his feet, and lowered the hatch in place again. But, because of the dusty dusk of the loft at four of the afternoon, he did not see her. The sudden flutter of the pigeons at his advent raised the sneeze-provocative detritus of husks of wheat and old Indian corn. He stepped over (with a loud sneeze, startling the pigeons and Ruth) beyond the barrel that was used to lean the hatch against. Then he tried to sneeze again, looking at the grey skylight, did sneeze, so that the pigeons jumped, and then declaimed :

" Ah ! I feel better. Don't be frightened. What are you frightened for ? "

Ruth, in her corner, doubtful what to do, just recovered from her own fear at the weird sight of the trap-door rising slowly, just enjoying her relief that the intruder was no monster—only a member of the staff—was now wondering if she should speak. If she did, this man, so unconscious of the presence of another human being in the loft, might take the blind staggers. Perhaps he would not stay long, depart, as he came, unaware of her.

“What are you frightened of?” he asked the pigeons again. “Have you been reading Maeterlinck?”

The tramp of his feet as he trod across the loft, stepping under the slope of the roof, drowned her titter of amusement. But what was he going to do over there under the sloping roof? He bent to a chest that she had not observed before.

As he bent there the pigeons made a simultaneous pounce upon him. It was just one amazing concentration of blue and white wings toward him. They clustered around him. They alighted upon him. When he opened the chest some flew boldly in and he had to herd them out with his hand. Then, holding the lid almost shut, he ferreted out a handful of Indian corn from this corn-chest under the slope of the roof. He turned and sat

down on the chest, bent under the steep slope of the roof.

Ruth wanted to rush over and ask for a handful of corn so that she also might feed the pigeons ; for he was holding out a seed at a time to this bird, to that bird—and it was a great sight ; she wanted to act in it, to participate in this relief from the “ simple human emotions ” of her readers.

It was then that she sneezed.

It was just a little drop of a sound, like the sneeze of a mouse. But there being, for the moment, no other sounds but the tip-tappings of the tiny pink claws of the pigeons as they milled on the floor before that rolling-stone serialist, he heard it, started, stared into the dim recesses of the loft, and said, I am sorry to say, “ Good God ! ”

“ Oh ! ” cried Ruth, “ I didn’t know whether to let you know I was here or not. I did not want to startle you.”

“ You like the pigeons too ? ” he said, accepting her presence there without further exclamation. Almost any of the clerks five flights below would have thought that her presence there was so droll as to be worth whispering about, if he heard of it, all round the desks. But this man who had been wrecked in the Straits of Magellan, who possessed in his flat, so

rumour ran, queer things from all the world, and wore on the second finger of his left hand, upon state occasions, a Navajo Indian ring, a ring both bizarre and simple, barbaric and exquisite, this man did not see anything queer in the editress of *Lovely Woman* sitting up in the pigeon-loft.

“Yes—I like their wings and motions,” she said. “And they help to make work so far away for a little while.”

“When I was a boy in Hastings,” he began, and she started, but interposed no exclamation, “I used to keep pigeons.”

He paused, and so she said :

“I often wanted to, but my father said they would pick the cement from between the stones of the chimney-stacks.”

“What of it ?” said John, scattering grain to his friends.

“Rabbits and guinea-pigs didn’t interest me,” she said.

“No. Rabbits are too human,” said Brough. “It’s the flight that makes pigeons interesting. I had a pair of brown tumblers. They used to go up with the flight, and I used to watch it going round and round, and every now and then the tumblers turning head over heels in air, and then hurrying after

the others. I had a pair of turbits too, with tiny heads and tiny beaks, and the daintiest of ruffs down their breasts like a frilled shirt ; and I had two pairs of black fantails. They are more splendid than white ones, and besides the white attracts too much attention, and boys go round and steal pigeons when they see them too much, snare them with a noosed string with corn inside the loop, sit away off a long way and twitch the noose tight round the birds' feet. I had some runts too. You know there is the Spanish runt, and the runt of Friesland, and then there are Leghorn runts. Mine were Friesland. They look as if their feathers were turned the wrong way. I had a hen feather-footed runt of Smyrna ; but she died. Somehow or other she got a quill feather in her eye. I took it out and bathed her eye and kept her in my bedroom. She grew far too tame. She did little tricks, and we were great friends ; but she softened as well as becoming civilised ; and when I put her out among the other pigeons she died of cold overnight. Did you ever see a lace ? ”

“ A lace ? No.”

“ They are not common. Indeed, they are scarce. They are snow-white, and the fibres of the wings seem all unconnected. They look as if they were made of

lace. I preferred my Jacobins, I think, to all the others. You know Jacobins ? ”

“ No, I don’t. I don’t know the different kinds at all well. I like the name Jacobin.”

“ Yes—it sounds like ‘ Jacobite,’ and makes you think of Scottish ballads, but it’s really called Jacobin because it has a hood of feathers (as well as a long ruff) which somebody thought like the cowl of a monk, and so he called it Jacobin.”

“ I had no idea there were so many kinds of pigeons. I know common kinds of pigeons, and these homers here, and fantails.”

He looked round the pecking crowd, and said :

“ They’re not all homers. That fellow there—and that—and that—and that—they are horsemen. And that over there, and that, and this ”—he handed it a seed of corn—“ are dragoons. I used to have a pair of dragoons. They brought up the tumblers’ young when the tumblers got tired of them too soon and preferred to go tumbling.”

“ What ! Do birds do that ? ”

“ Oh yes, just like humans. It’s a funny world, isn’t it ? Even pigeons are a little human too. I’d rather raise apples and roses than pigeons now. However ! ” And he threw down the last of his handful of seed.

“ Apples and roses ? ”

“ Yes. When I get sick of the W. D. & H. offices I shall go to a place I know. When I was there, there was nothing but just sandslopes and bunch grass and sage giving off a scent in the mornings and at night that——” He paused and sat staring over the pigeons’ backs. “ The Thompson River comes down there, running below. You can hear it shouting. You can see the slopes of the banks wearing away and falling into it ; and then everything goes quiet again. If you ever get sick, Miss Winter, sick of your work here, and want to get away from telephone bells and feel—feel good—you go to Cultus, up on to the benches and look down on the Thompson. If ever London broke me I’d go there.”

“ Where is this Cultus ? ” she asked.

“ In the Dry Belt.”

“ Dry Belt ? ” she said.

“ Of British Columbia,” he answered.

He rose.

“ Ah, well, tea will be getting cold. Good-day, Miss Winter.” And he raised the hatch, stepped down on to the ladder, retreated, lowering the hatch, bowed to her when his head was on a level with the floor, all perfectly solemn.

It was droll to see this man bowing thus, droll to see his solemnity ; from the way he departed one might have thought that he had an idea that this pigeon-loft was Miss Winter's room, where she edited her paper, and that to leave an editorial room through a hole in the floor was no more droll than to leave it through an upright hole in the wall.

She laughed, for it was really droll, and as she laughed the hatch rose again, and John Brough looked in, thrusting up his bristly head.

" It has just struck me," he said, " that that must have looked very comical."

" What must ? " she said, laughing. " Your departure ? "

" Yes," he said, " like this," and bowed again, and disappeared—and did not come back.

CHAPTER VI: RUTH'S POLICEMAN

UPON the day to which this chapter and the three following shall relate Ruth had lain a-bed till eleven o'clock. She had been working very hard for days, the circulation was going up, and so she lay still, thanking God for a bed in the moments between sleep and waking, and blinking up at the whiteness on the ceiling—a whiteness which suggested that it was a bright day beyond the drawn green blinds.

At last, however, visions of her office room, and her desk, brought her from bed. She could visualise the fat envelopes, and thin envelopes, envelopes with MSS., envelopes containing messages of thanks for the papers, envelopes containing messages of ingratitude for them, the latter mostly anonymous, envelopes, in short, of all grades, mounting up in stacks on the pull-out leaves.

She had lunch at home with her mother and the parrot and the little black cat that begged, and she felt very greatly rested. Having lain a-bed so long, having lunched at home, she did not feel that she must rush to the office and make up for lost time.

She felt that time was not lost when it brought such sense of freshness.

With spirit rejuvenated, she was able to see and to enjoy the reflected suns in the canal water when she came along Blomfield Avenue to board an omnibus. And though when she arrived at Charing Cross the clock of Saint Martin's in the Fields told three above the hum of the traffic, she alighted there instead of continuing on the omnibus down the seething Strand and into the gulch of Fleet Street.

Something restful in the tone of the front of Morely's Hotel, there being thin sunlight on it to bring out its mellowness, helped to suggest that she alight here, and, passing down to the Embankment, come to the offices along Thames-side. The fountains in Trafalgar Square were playing. A four-in-hand, beloved by American visitors, glided over the islanded crossing before the square and down Northumberland Avenue.

At the Embankment Ruth crossed the hazardous race-track and walked on the riverside, looking upon the barges that swung on the tide, the police-boat hastening like a wasp, ever and again looking on the pavement, remarking the lacework patterns of the shadows of the little trees that stand along the pavement there, springing up out of tall protecting

iron cages lest, being beautiful, they might be maimed.

Crossing the race-track again at its easterly end she passed up John Carpenter Street, and came upon a lost puppy blubbering and bounding in the gutter.

Certainly it could not be left there to be briefly speculated over by passers-by and then forgotten. Clearly it was for a happy, rested person to secure it and carry it to the police station, there to claim for it what alms the law affords for all the lost.

Two cads, seeing her trying to catch the weeping but timid pup, and evidently considering that people of consequence do not do such things, advanced amiably upon her, and one said : “ Can I catch it for you ? Do let me,” with that curious drawing-room, engaging note in the enunciation of the “ do.”

“ Won’t you let me ? ” asked the other.

“ I am very much obliged to you both,” said Ruth ; and Number One, having caught up the demented and toothless morsel, but not having the capacity for entire comprehension of a situation unless it was a *risqué* one, when she held out her hand for the pup must needs say :

“ Oh, I think you had better let me carry it for you. It might bite.”

“ I do not think that I am afraid of that,” she

said ; “ but seeing you are so kind, and if you are going in that direction, I really can’t leave the poor thing plaintively here.”

The cad was looking at her now ; up till then he had only seen a young person of the opposite sex trying to catch a crying and frightened pup and he considered it was a position in which to offer familiarity. There are young men like that in London. He fell in step with her, his companion adopting such an air, beside him, as he adopted when helping to pass round the coffee at the house of his manager on those occasions when the manager, twice a year, entertained the staff, and the manager’s wife succeeded in getting them through the evening without showing that they bored her stiff.

Ruth led them thus to the police station and at the unassuming but stern portals turned in. The bearer of the dog, with a sudden twitch of his neck, looked at the lamp over the door, and seeing it so directly labelled “ Police Station,” seemed desirous to resign the dog to her. But the other said quietly (probably as “ lookers-on see most of the game ”) :

“ Take it in for the young lady, seeing you have carried it so far.”

Ruth bowed to this wise young man, who bared his head with a reverence in which was no mockery ;

also a furtive hope showed in his eyes—a furtive hope that perhaps she had no suspicion that he, too, was a cad.

The bearer of the bleating puppy entered with Ruth then, but at the swing-doors, giving into the office, he considered it advisable to adopt a swagger, to appear upon the scene as if he carried the pup for a friend. Unassumingly (and who can say how far consciously, how far unconsciously ?) Ruth check-mated him by saying sweetly :

“ Thank you. You might just put it on the counter.”

The chief officer stepped toward her, holding in his hand the gold-rimmed pince-nez by which civilians, unacquainted with the significance of the stripes on constables’ arms, can generally select the chief figure in blue.

“ Good-day ! ” he said.

“ This gentleman,” said Ruth, “ has kindly helped to carry a lost pup.” She turned to the gentleman, and said : “ Thank you so much.”

“ You are very welcome,” replied the young Don Juan, who had graduated to light porter, and he bowed, and dismissed himself, while Ruth begged the gold-rimmed pince-nez man in blue behind the counter to care for the dog. He called a constable.

“ Must I go outside with him,” asked Ruth, “ and when I let the dog go——”

“ No ; not in this office,” he said. “ That is the law in some suburban offices, but not here. You have rescued lost dogs before ? ” he suggested, seeing her thus conversant with the formality of some offices.

“ Oh yes—it’s almost a habit,” she admitted, and eliminated his frown by a friendly blink that set him a-smiling.

The constable lifted up the pup, that had been skating and falling on the shiny counter, and tucked it into his palm. His chief took a note of Ruth’s name and address, and, leaving the pup under the care of the law, Ruth passed on to the office half-an-hour later than she would have been had she not encountered the blundering little object, but not at all regretful, perhaps indeed even more inclined now than she had been at Charing Cross (when she decided to walk on tree-shadowed pavements to the office) to seek these asides of life that should be, were civilisation not a blessing with blemishes, the chief interests of all maids, mean or muslined.

The offices had recently been enlarged, and a new room, a large, double-windowed room, had been offered to Ruth by Cromarty. She had been glad to

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have a room of her own, but had not jumped at the offer too eagerly lest Cromarty might think that Ettie Wilson bored her. She passed along the corridors and entered her room that wore, she thought, an air as of waiting for her and of wondering why she had tarried. She looked at her stacked envelopes.

Stacked ! So high were they stacked to left and right on the pull-out shelves that they had avalanched on to the floor. She explored in the waste-paper basket to be sure that none had avalanched there ; and then she rolled up her desk cover and sat down, pulled out a drawer to left and into it tossed all the MSS.—and then a boy popped his head in at the door and mumbled : “ Oh, you are in, Miss Winter.”

“ Yes, I’m here. Somebody wants me ? ”

“ No, miss. I only looked to see—for bringing your tea.”

What a glorious life ! How glorious, if only once in a blue moon, to arrive at the office not till afternoon tea-time—even if, to pay for the sense of freedom from Routine gained thereby, one had to toil and slave early and late for days in a calling that never leaves the mind quite empty of that odd feeling that voices itself in the phrase : “ I wonder if I have left

anything undone that ought to have been done, and if the paper is now being printed with some glaring and dangerous error."

Ruth had, however, been "well ahead"; and now the mountains of paper seemed to have been piled up by an office boy who desired to awaken alarm in her heart when she did arrive; for, under the apparent pile, was a large box of flowers "from an admiring reader of *Lovely Woman* for the editress."

She put all the chief notes into a large envelope, the *dolce far niente* sense still within her heart. That envelope she would take home with her and look over its contents at night, after the fresh day was done and lights were lit and blinds drawn.

Then the letter-distributing boy brought in an envelope marked "Urgent—copy," and she opened it, read the note which accompanied it—and very nearly had filched from her, thereby, her delight in being an editress, presumably, but which really, I think, if she had been introspective, she might have discovered was chiefly delight in the return of May, with its thin airs and sunshine and budding trees.

CHAPTER VII: BROUGH'S POLICEMAN

THAT day John Brough, too, had rested. All morning he had sat in pyjamas, happed about in a great dressing-gown, rested and pottered over what he called (to himself) his anodynes. Why he should not have called them his "Real Things" I don't know, unless, perhaps, because of his humility, and because the W. D. & H. offices and the Majorities, in their arrogance, thought that they were side-issues and that *The Daily Paper* was the Real Thing.

He had found that in modern literature, as well as in the ancient books, the voice sometimes sounds. From the writing of stories which were advertised by the W. D. & H. firm as "pulsing with human emotions," he turned often to his anodynes. So far they had been the anodynes provided by the old men who, in more leisurely times, wrote more leisurely sentences than the hurried men of to-day, into whose prose, as into whose hearts, enters the smart flurry of modernity. Simple these old men might be in places, but the voice was always there, and the love.

Lately he had stumbled upon the work of Henry

James, and now, not self-pitying enough to see the irony of the odd-job man of the "literary staff" of the W. D. & H. house pouring over "Essays in London," "Partial Portraits" and "French Poets and Novelists," he pottered away a forenoon, and smoked tobacco. He had found a modern who bowed across the ages to Sir Thomas Browne. The essays of James he read and reread. The novels were to him what the Rocky Mountains are to prospectors.

From his own narratives of "just then a gleam of blue was above him—something flashed—it was a steel-blue blade," he turned to Henry James and read his own selections :

" 'The place evidently met her special taste, and a kind of profane piety had dropped on her, drizzling down, in the cold light, in silver, in crystal, in faint, mixed delicacies of colour, almost as on a pilgrim at a shrine. She might have been, herself—all Greuze tints, all pale pinks, and blues, and pearly whites, and candid eyes—an old dead pastel, under glass.' "

" 'The irrecoverable days had come back to her from far off ; they were part of the sense of the cool upper air and of everything else that hung like an indestructible scent to the torn garment of youth—

the taste of honey and the luxury of milk, the sound of cattle-bells and the rush of streams, the fragrance of trodden balms and the dizziness of deep gorges.' ”

He thrust the volume enshrining that gently back into its shelf and selected another, turned the pages deftly and as if they were sacred, and read :

“ ‘ Everything was over and he too at last could rest. He walked back through the narrow, winding streets to the edge of the Seine, and there he saw, close above him, high and mild and grey, the twin towers of Notre Dame. He crossed one of the bridges and paused in the voided space that makes the great front clear ; then he went in beneath the grossly imaged portals. He wandered some distance up the nave and sat down in the splendid dimness. He sat a long time ; he heard far-away bells chiming off into space at long intervals, the big bronze syllables of the Word. He was very tired, but such a place was a kingdom of rest. He said no prayers ; he had no prayers to say. He had nothing to be thankful for, and he had nothing to ask, nothing to ask because now he must take care of himself.’ ”

He put the book down and sat looking up through his window into the pale blue sky over London, and

was at peace. After a little space he opened yet another volume, and read :

“ ‘ It was late in the summer of 1877, he spent a few days in London on his way to Madrid, in the hushed grey August, and I remember dining with him at a dim little hotel in Park Street, which I had never before and have never entered since, but which, whenever I pass it, seems to look at me with the melancholy of those inanimate things that have participated.’ ”

And what he saw there was not a house front. The inanimate things that had participated in Brough's life seemed then, for some reason, the white-painted galley of the grain clipper on which he had made his last voyage—that for one ; and for another a towering precipice in British Columbia called MacIntyre's Bluff ; and for another the great sloping sides of yellow hill on either side of the Thompson River.

The memory picture that had been before him when he told the editress of *Lovely Woman* whither he would fly when broken, came up again in his mind's eye. He looked upon it, looked away into his past, saw it as one sees a green and black and yellow landscape when looking through a telescope the

wrong way, and anon he could almost hear the Thompson calling to him, high and low, in the movements of the wind.

He took up another volume, sighing, though he knew it not, ran his eye through and read :

“ ‘I caught him, yes. I held him—it may be imagined with what a passion ; but at the end of a minute I began to feel what it truly was that I held. We were alone with the quiet day, and the little heart, dispossessed, had stopped.’ ”

“ Alone with the quiet day,” he said gently. He half rose and knocked out his pipe on the under side of the mantelpiece.

A rat-tat sounded on the outer door and leisurely he responded to the summons, opening to a big man under a high hat, wearing a long ulster, with gold pince-nez in his left hand and an envelope in his right.

“ Mr Brough ? ” said the visitor, and presented the envelope.

“ Come in,” said Brough. “ I think I recall the voice. You’re Messrs Paton & Davis ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” answered the man at the door.

“ Come in, come in.”

When Messrs Paton & Davis entered Mr Brough's sitting-room his eyes roved, gleaming, round the apartment.

"I'm afraid I disturb you," he said.

"Not at all," said Brough. "I'm afraid you'll take me for an effete member of civilisation. You'd never believe that I've spent arduous days as a ship's stoker from 'Cisco to Melbourne and never had a bucket of water flung on me to bring me out of the bunk, or that I've got up morning after morning at the ungodly hour of four, shivering and stiff, and fed and watered cattle and, after the stiffness was over, considered that four of the morning was *not* an ungodly hour, but, on the contrary, the hour when God walks. I don't like anyone to think me effete. We all have to die, Mr Davis——"

"Paton, sir. My partner——"

"We all have to die, Mr Paton; but let us die before we're effete. Only, London is not good, London is not good."

"Late hours?" suggested Mr Paton.

"Well, not so much that as the fact that there is nothing to wake one in London except the cry of 'Milk-o!' I've stopped the boy doing it on these stairs. Fancy a man being wakened with the cry of 'Milk-o!' when he has been wakened with the

crying of bald-headed eagles——” And he paused and blew out a “fff !”

Mr Paton looked at him as if with a verdict held in abeyance. He kept muttering a word or two of Mr Brough’s, like an echo, echoing and bowing.

“Bald-headed eagles,” he said, and bowed.

Brough looked at Mr Paton sadly.

“Yes, as bald as you,” he said absently. He was really still “not at home.”

“As bald as me,” echoed the account-collector.

Brough came back to sanity.

“You have an account ?” he asked.

Mr Paton presented it, and Brough perused it and read out : “Cork Linoleum, twenty-seven yards at one shilling and twopence per yard, one pound eleven shillings and sixpence. Payment is urgently requested of this long-standing account.”

He read it quietly, and then looked up. And they stared at each other—Mr Paton and John Brough.

“It’s our usual form, sir, after three months,” said Mr Paton.

“I must apologise,” said Brough. “I have always been putting off and putting off. People owe me money. I must owe others. I hate doing it ; but it is forced on me. I used always to pay cash for everything. But I’m not allowed to now. Fate is

too strong for me. It's civilisation that is wrong. I am not good at dunning for payments—and if one doesn't dun one doesn't get one's money."

"It's quite true, sir. It's a bad system. And yet, of course, the whole system of civilisation, as you call it, is a system of credit. With ready-money payments for everything we should require so much money——"

"Sit down, please," said Brough, and while Mr Paton was expounding his theory of credit, Brough was being wrecked in the Straits of Magellan, waiting at Seattle, all sorts of things. This absence was not rudeness. He really could not follow. When Mr Paton ended Brough allowed a courteous silence to ensue before he said :

"About this cork linoleum. I have always been putting off and putting off. I wanted just to check the area of it. A matter of business, you understand ?"

"Oh, perfectly, sir, perfectly. Quite understand. Check the amount."

"But I've forgotten how to do sums," Brough explained.

"Do sums," said Mr Paton.

"Arithmetic ! Decimals ! Algebra !" Brough broke out. "As mental gymnastics—true—I always

saw that. But I have always considered that school teaching is useless in life and that we educate ourselves after." He seemed to grow excited. "We are all, in short, self-made men."

"I'm a self-made man myself, sir," said the furniture and linoleum dealer.

Brough executed a bow in his chair and handed a cigar. He kept them for such occasions.

"I always argued that the education we get at school is of no use in after life apart from teaching the mind agility," he continued. "But I see now that it is; and it is all part and parcel of civilisation. School education is designed to prepare us to measure linoleum."

"Measure linoleum," grunted Mr Paton.

"I have it," cried Brough. "Would you mind showing me how to count the square yards? I can do multiplication."

Mr Paton put his hand on Brough's shoulder, the arm stretched to him (as Brough once saw from the gallery of a music hall, the brutal-looking father put his hand on the whistling marvel), and beamed on him.

"I'll show you," said Mr Paton. He produced from his tail pocket a folding yard-stick, and began to pace the floor like a large spider.

Brough followed him nimbly enough, but was much puzzled. He grew more puzzled. Baffled ! He gave it up !

“ Possessions ! ” he broke out. “ It is possessions that clog and atrophy our lives. If I hadn't bought that linoleum I should never have required to be able to count square yards.”

“ Yes—square yards—yards——”

“ Possessions are the mistake. The plain boards would have done me. I went and got the linoleum to keep them clean. Now I've to buy some rugs to keep my feet warm.”

“ We have a very fine line in rugs,” said the stout gentleman, drawing erect, measuring-stick in hand.

“ But I must pay for the linoleum first,” cried Brough.

“ Yes, sir ; yes, sir ; linoleum first—first—twenty-seven yards.”

Brough looked over toward his desk.

“ I think I've some money,” he said, and crossed to the desk. “ Yes. I've quite a lot ! ”

He paid the money to Mr Paton—who receipted the account, and then, on the last stroke of his pen, began to expound again his theory of credit, as if in haste to blanket something over with it. But at last he looked at his gold watch.

“ Bless my soul ! ” he broke out, “ it is half-past eleven. When you get me on my pet subject I have no idea of the flight of time.”

Brough sighed.

“ I suppose time to you is money,” said he. “ To me it is eternity. I can never treat our comprehensible fragment of it seriously, for long at a stretch. I always feel the sense of the paltriness of money-making, and hoarding, and saving, and bilking, and being bilked—and then two handfuls of white dust shut in an urn of brass. The incomprehensible future seems so much more real than the incomprehensible present. It will be like going home.”

Mr Paton had risen and was now staring at the floor. He coughed. He cleared his throat. He looked this way and that. His eye fell upon the porcelain figure and seemed to look through it.

“ I’m going to count that floor space again,” he said. “ I can’t think it really makes so much as that account says.”

“ Neither could I ; but then I’m dense that way,” said Brough.

“ There must be some mistake,” said Mr Paton, and took off his pince-nez, and wiped his eyes with a red duster. He produced his yard-stick, and stooped over the floor like a great boy, and counted.

“No,” he broke out ; “I can’t think how. See, sir ! Let me show you again,” and he went over it afresh with Brough. It was quite simple that time, when the careful calculation announced seventeen yards.

Paton took up the account and altered it, making the necessary correction, and returned to Brough’s palm the difference in price of eleven shillings and eightpence. Then suddenly he wheeled about with a “Good-morning, sir, good-morning, sir, good-morning, my dear sir. God help you ! God bless you !” and he ran into the passage with a series of little coughs, he too precipitous in his flight, and Brough too astounded for the usual amenities of an exit.

It struck Brough, standing at the sitting-room door, hearkening to the retreating steps, that Mr Paton had opened the outer door for himself and *run* away. He re-entered the room somewhat puzzled. He found, after much search in a trunk of incongruous contents, a tape measure, and he began, with much grunting, to measure the floor.

“Either Mr Paton was always an angel, or he was a rogue and is now an angel,” he said, as he toiled. And again, grunting at his task : “Either he has made a reduction because he has been happy here, with me listening so patiently to his theory of credit

—how much did he make the second time ? Let me see ? Yes—seventeen yards.”

Brough rose.

“That’s what I make again,” said he. “And seventeen times one and twopence is nineteen—— Well, well. He was a rogue, then, and my patient interest in his theories made him a saint !”

It did not occur to him that it was the way he had talked to Mr Paton of time and eternity that had made the change.

And now, the forenoon being far spent, he washed, dressed, and went forth to lunch, beaming upon the dark-skinned young gentleman in dress suit who opened the restaurant door to him, raising his hat to a smiling lady behind the counter—on which he saw, with one comprehensive glance, after that salutation, a side of bacon covered with what looked like crumbs of toast, a chicken with a sprig of parsley jauntily under its wing, plates heaped with crinkly meringues, electro-plate salvers piled with oranges and bananas, white salad bowls with yellow of lettuce and luscious red of sliced beetroot, and scarlet of cleft tomatoes, also tumblers with celery sticking up at all angles, and pewter-pots shining in a way that he thought might be enough to turn an artistic teetotaller into a muddled ale-bibber.

Lunch over, he felt, still as if treading on air, a rested man, and bethought him of the further freshness of the river, mounted upon an omnibus for London Bridge and enjoyed, as keenly as if seeing it for the first time, the descent to the Bridge after turning out of Cannon Street. At the northern end a great cloud of gulls wheeled and curved, like great flakes of snow in a whirling wind.

He alighted there and gave a boy sixpence for a penny bag of sprats to feed the seagulls; tossed sprats in air and watched the gulls sweep and catch the fish, screaming and crying above the crowds.

"Did you see that one curve?" he shouted to the sprat-seller.

The appalled boy nodded.

"That! Did you see that?" Brough bawled.

A policeman touched his shoulder.

"Very sorry, sir," he said. "It's a great sight, but you're collecting a crowd."

"I am of little service to the State," said John Brough, and shook hands with the policeman. They saluted each other, and Brough took omnibus to Queen Victoria Street, walked down to Blackfriars Bridge, and marched meditatively up John Carpenter Street.

CHAPTER VIII : MATTERS OF MOMENT

ONE day in the summer the proprietor telephoned to his managing editor from Brighton : “ I shall be in the offices to-morrow, early, and want to talk to you, Blandley, and the advertising manager.”

He had had an idea, walking upon Brighton Promenade, and the idea was this :

“ I am going to float, gentlemen,” said he, early in the forenoon, “ a new paper. I am going to call it *Between Two Stools*. It is to be designed for young men at the age when they are uncertain whether to become great musical composers, leading poets, or to remain clerks in banks, insurance, and shipping offices. It is a class that we have always with us. It is always there to be guffed—I mean catered for.” He cleared a phlegmy throat and snapped open a little box from which he drew, with difficulty, for thumb and forefinger nearly filled it, a smoker’s lozenge, popped it into his mouth and sucked hard and volubly. “ Now, what I want this paper to have especially is a weekly Feature Page. Perhaps this page might be called ‘ Our Own Readers’ Twaddle ’ ;

but that you will discuss when you've got the hang of my idear."

He produced from the top right pocket of his waistcoat what looked like a silver pencil-case, but what was really a toothpick, sprung the toothpick from its sheath, and attended to an upper molar.

"Yes, yes, I see it grow," he grunted. "Under the heading of 'Our Own Twaddle,' there will be a little text in italics. I suggest 'Let 'em all come'; but that, too, you will consider. Each week—now here is my point—each week you will publish an article by one of the really good guff-merchants and whet-men. That will be your business, Cromarty. You know where to put your hand on men that can write good, irritating, disturbing page articles. Keep your eyes open for more men like Mapleton Wild, and women like Ettie Wilson. I don't give a snap whether they do it tongue in cheek or from the pit of their stomachs. All we must have is articles with something that will make young men take up their pens and write. But don't you leave it to them. Underneath the whet-article you will have a little tablet, standing, you understand—see to that. It will read—— I've been thinking it over—half-a-minute—I've got a note of it."

He sucked in his paunch a second or two to aid him in extracting a slip of paper from the lower pocket of his waistcoat. "Yes, the tablet will read thus"—he flicked on his gold pince-nez—" 'Our Readers' Opinions on Mr [leave it blank for the name] article are solicited. Ours is a Land of Free Speech. We give you a page. Four prizes offered. See 'Our Own Twaddle Page' for particulars.' We might call the page Trafalgar Square! No—no. That might offend."

He drew forth a little notebook from an inner pocket of his coat, and made a memorandum there for future reference, thus: "Suggestion—Socialist paper called Trafalgar." He looked up bulbously then and elevated his brows at Cromarty.

Cromarty nodded comprehendingly. Blandley coughed and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"You see the idear?" the proprietor inquired, looking from one to the other. "By the way—that fellow Brough has to go on this paper too. He will be able to give replies to correspondents with a salt of experience in them. If bank clerks ain't all immersed in golf, they're either, as I said, thinking of going on the stage, or becoming poets, or flautists, or some such long-haired stunt—or else they're

worrying about whether they're fit to go to the colonies."

Blandley, as the proprietor googled his great jumping eyes at him then till the bloodshot bits looked dangerous, interjected :

" Or getting married."

The proprietor's lips bulged and drew together.

" I don't see the point, sir," he said. " I'm talking business, not fritter. I leave that to the whet-men. *Baby Bunting* and *Lovely Woman* link up there."

" Oh yes, of course," said Blandley.

On this paper, then, Brough had had a hand since the first number came out, with a flourish of bills, in the fall of the year, somewhere about the time (to link its appearance with facts of our story) that Ettie Wilson gained an understanding of the certain qualities looked for in the office.

Of all the publications from the W. D. & H. house *Between Two Stools* was the one that Brough enjoyed best. He could now and then read a page or two in it for his own enjoyment. But the day was to come when here, too, what is called his literary conscience, was to set him rampant and wild-eyed.

After having fed the gulls and seen the two sides of a policeman, the official and the poetical, he came up to the offices, imagining that he was " ahead with

his work." But he had forgotten something. He arrived to find two potato sacks by the side of his desk, left there by the systematic young lady whose duty it was to see that everybody was supplied, on the appointed days, with the correspondence.

Brough opened the first sack, looked up at his calendar, scratched his forehead.

"Why, of course!" he thought. "This is the day for reading the 'Twaddle' for *Between Two Stools*." The desk was also full of letters addressed "Editor, *B. T. S.*, Fleet Street," and in the corner of each was the word "Twaddle."

Brough had not yet read the "whet-article"; so he turned to it now that he might the better be able to understand what was aggravating into cacography two sackfuls of correspondents. The result was beyond all expectation.

He read the article, slowly simmering line by line, boiling, fizzing. He rent the paper in two and plunged it into his waste-paper basket. He left the room. He walked upstairs. He climbed the ultimate ladder. Brokenly he forced up the hatch of the pigeon-loft, and entered into the charmed circle of the pigeons.

They clustered round him and, still brokenly, he inquired of them :

“Is Business Healthier than Art? Is Art Healthier than Business?”

The pigeons circled round their friend.

“Do you hear, pigeons? Healthier! Healthier!! Healthier!!!” he ejaculated.

This was Brough’s first visit to the loft since the day he met Ruth there. For quite definite reasons he had absented himself from the pigeon-loft. Indeed he had decided never to go up there again, unless when Ruth was on holiday. It was not prudishness that had come to the rolling stone. He was really behaving more like a rolling stone than a grey chaperon, or guardian of the *convenances*.

“Even journalists,” he had considered, “the decentest of mortals, are not wholly free from the ‘Window in Thrums’ qualities.”

And again :

“I would not for the world bore her, and by boring her rob her of the pleasure of coming up here.”

And besides :

“She, as the woman, should have the first right to the sanctuary of the attic and the solace of its dusty beams, flutter of husks of wheat and pigeons’ wings, whimsical solace from telephone bells and divorce cases, and falls from windows, and smashing of Booker Washington’s windows by anti-black

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fiends who have heard only of rapes in Arkansas and never read the lyrics of Paul Laurence Dunbar, the New York coon elevator boy, not to speak of other window smashings by admirers of freed men, whimsical solace in watching that big homer hen fidget a feather from her back, the way the barber at Villiers Street clips away my under hair, flick it from her coral beak and then sit on one leg, head on side, watching it float down."

He now sat on the corn-chest. He remained immobile there (like a clothed replica of Rodin's statue of the Thinker who sits between the pillars of the Panthéon), remained statuesque so long, with the pigeons round him, that at last a mouse ran out from behind the corn-chest, and, sitting upon its haunches, like a miniature kangaroo, looked with beady eyes at him.

And then the hatch rose slowly, up, up. Brough saw it leant against the barrel, he sitting on that side. And a very thin voice said, in a pitch of very infinite disgust :

" Is Kissing Dangerous ? Is Kissing Dangerous ? Dangerous, mark you. Dangerous ! Dangerous !! Dangerous !!! "

CHAPTER IX : INVIDIOUS COMPARISON

HISTORY, if it does not repeat itself, creates parallel passages.

For fear of frightening the editress of *Lovely Woman* and thereby precipitating her down the ladder, Brough remained breathlessly silent while the pigeons all left him and, with a multitude of swirlings, alightings, and arisings, formed a circle round the hatchway.

“ Oh, you birds ! ” said Ruth, lowering the trap-door. Because of the dusty dusk of the loft at four of the afternoon she did not see Brough. “ You know nothing about it. Even if you are used once in a blue moon to carry messages, God saves you from knowing what it is that you bring. You are only inspired by the desire to go home. That desire is taken advantage of ; but it is not so terrible with you as with me. Here am I——”

Brough felt that a *confession intime* trembled on her lips, so he laughed—to announce his presence.

She started far less than I would have imagined. I begin to see in her a capacity for emergencies ;

though perhaps my reader, more astute to discern character of woman, has expected the capacity already.

“ Oh, Mr Brough ! You here ! ” she said.

Having spoken in response to his sense of honour Brough probably thought he might now speak in response to his curiosity. There is an old chestnut joke which tells how a toper passed a public-house and then, declaring “ Well done, resolution,” returned to the public-house to celebrate his victory.

“ What were you going to say ? ” asked Brough.

She did not comment, “ How silly of me to speak to the pigeons ! ” Instead she considered a moment, and recollected.

“ I think I was going to say something to the effect that here am I in this office, because I have a certain craving for getting out some of myself through my finger-tips, holding a pen ; here am I, because of that craving, that desire for expression, some inward thing that is not mortal ; here am I selecting the best-written paper on ‘ Is Kissing Dangerous ? ’—a kind of carrier pigeon who knows what is in the letters he carries. What a question ! What a world ! Mr Brough, it must be pretty rough on you—this place. You have seen the Atlantic, the Pacific, and nothing but sea, blue and purple. You have

been shipwrecked, and it must be awful for you to remember these things and then consider London's millions and know that it has its thousands who are interested in the pathology and psychology of 'Is Kissing Dangerous?' Oh, but yours is a paper for men, not women. You do not have these futilities to handle."

"I have as bad in other fields," said Brough. "I was just asking the pigeons before you arrived, 'Is Business Healthier than Art? Is Art Healthier than Business?' It may not be so obvious a query; and osculation may be of wider interest than Art. *Between Two Stools* has only eighty thousand readers weekly, and you have three hundred thousand. But the Atlantic on the one hand and these questions on the other is the kind of comparison that might lead to tears."

She saw how solemn he looked.

"Or laughter—or laughter, Mr Brough," she suggested.

She stepped toward the chest, seeing how the pigeons besought her for the roll which she did not have to-day. She had (as we know) lunched at home; and the roll was always one of those round crackly-crustéd yellow restaurant ones secreted with a nod to the waiter before leaving her table.

It struck neither of them that she had not to express her intention, merely stepped over to the chest, toward Brough, and he rose, lifted the lid ; she inserted her hand and, “ Oh, how delightful it feels in one’s fingers,” she cried. “ It makes me think of the sand of the Northumberland beaches.” She took forth a handful of corn, and he lowered the lid and sat down again.

“ Yes, by God ! ” he said. “ ‘ Is Kissing Dangerous ’ must seem a puny refrain in the ear of a man who hangs to a hen-coop in the South Atlantic with no sight of land when he’s in the trough of the waves, and only a blink of it when he rises to the top.”

“ What does he think then ? ” she asked. “ I read your article on that experience, but you didn’t say much. Couldn’t you ? ”

“ Oh ! I said—I said a lot. But Cromarty cut it out. Half of his readers, he said, would consider it blasphemy.”

“ Blasphemy ! ”

“ Yes. Almost all I thought, nearly all the time, was, ‘ Oh, God—oh, my dear God—this is a little cruel of you.’ You see, it was a clear day, and the colours were tremendous. The wind was frightful, but the sun was bright and the colours were

tremendous ! I sat on that coop just gibbering, ‘ Oh, God—I think You are cruel to put me down on a day like this. Oh, God, I want to live and see more of these colours. I’ve never seen anything like to-day. You might have put me down in fog, when I couldn’t see it like this.’ That, candidly, was the chief thought. Cromarty cut out what I wrote about my feelings, but he left in the phrase, ‘ I clung to the hen-coop and gibbered.’ He left that in—but he cut out what I gibbered ! Oh, I don’t mind so much as you might think. I had no desire to pose as a man not scared. I was scared all the way through.”

He sat quiet for a spell.

“ It was terrible,” he said. “ Mike was sitting on the rail when he went down.”

Ruth did not ask who Mike was ; she saw that Brough was beholding the scene again, and little details of construction of his story could be left.

“ Mike was sitting on the rail when he went down,” he said, “ and he laughed, and said, ‘ Some of you—er—people, will have more to think of now than squabbling over the last tobacco.’ And then he turned to one of the men who was in a terrible state. ‘ You’d better give me that quid of chewing you’ve got left,’ he said. ‘ You couldn’t enjoy it now, like

me.' I can't think of it," Brough ended. "I liked Mike—and he was drowned. He was a great card."

He held out a hand and his pet pigeon flew up.

"I don't know," he commented aloud, thinking of Ruth's trouble over her futilitarians, "perhaps our work is not so trivial. I've had a lot of knocks and I still remember them well enough to think it's worth doing things that don't mean much to the world, beyond amusing it, so as to be able to sit up here with the pigeons. You see, I like sitting with the pigeons. I like feeding seagulls, and watching the way they sweep and curve."

"If Cromarty heard this he would say that it would be good for you to be put on the news side of the offices, and to learn about things that matter."

Brough shook his head.

"Falls from windows. Divorces. Murders. Murder trials. Full details of the suicide of a poet when he goes mad, for people to read who never read one word of his work. News! News! Oh no! I'd rather give them stories. I had a great time yesterday with the proprietor."

"Did he visit you?" she asked.

"Yes. And you?"

"Yes."

“ Very affable all round, evidently. I hear he’s just come across *entente cordiale*. Blandley says he discovered, by asking for it at the club, that it wasn’t a drink. He chatted quite nicely. Asked me if I had an idea for a story—a really tragic one ; and I asked him what he thought of a vegetarian young lady falling in love with a butcher.”

“ Honest Injun ? ”

“ Yes, indeed ; and he considered it and said, ‘ If you could make the vegetarian girl a flower girl, say, it would be in tone for *The Lancashire Lass*—poor-class readers, you know ; but where does the tragedy come in ? ’ ”

“ What did you say ? ” she laughed.

“ I said I would think it over. I felt very flat then.”

“ You would. By the way, I’m no tale-bearer, but the editor of *The Evening One* has been going round the office very puzzled, asking about you.”

“ About me ? I had a chat with him the other day.”

“ He says that you went into his room and told him that he had made a glaring mistake in his paper——”

Brough laughed.

“ You did tell him, then, that a man falling from a

window and getting killed was an accident, and not a tragedy ? ”

“ Yes. He said he would get a consensus of public opinion on the subject ; but I think he thought me mad.”

“ He said that you were,” Ruth acknowledged, with a laugh, “ and Cromarty answered, ‘ Quite so—he’s in his right place ; sanity on the news side—madness on the literary side. You only give me proof of my discrimination in putting him where I did ! ’ ”

Brough had ceased to think of himself.

“ I liked what you said to the pigeons, when you came up, about going home,” he remarked.

“ I say,” she asked, ignoring his remark, “ how did you ever manage to write leaders for *The Daily One* ? You used to, did you not ? ”

“ Yes—I wrote leaders for them once upon a time. I used not to have to shave myself then—and I hate going to a barber to be scraped.”

Ruth remembered “ as mad as a hatter ” and wondered if perhaps, after all, it was true of him.

“ The barber used to talk about two leaders to me every day, and I squared my conscience by giving him a tip of sixpence to himself.”

“ And he took it ? ”

“ Yes.”

“Mean of him, wasn’t it, to take that every day?”

“Well, it was mean of me, in a way, to use him. I would have given him more, only I thought he might wonder if I was mad.”

“Yes, I see,” said Ruth.

“Then I simply wrote down what he said—but with a sort of magisterial air,” Brough explained. “If I needed still another leader I used to get Blandley to talk about some subject and write down just the very opposite. Blandley was always slow at first, but if I contradicted him he used to be explanatory and fierce—splendid leader style. He was very good when I owned up afterwards. The news editor thought I had very pronounced views. I did this for six months till Cromarty one day mentioned a name that seemed familiar, and I asked him who it was he was speaking of. It appears it was the Prime Minister. He interrogated me then about my leaders. I could see that he had some difficulty at first in believing my explanations about Blandley and the barber, but eventually he told me that I had a great future before me, but that he was afraid to risk my political leaders any more. The day might come when I would make a tremendous blunder, and it would be just luck for him to be ill

that day, and the leader would go into the paper unread."

Ruth shrieked with merriment over this.

"He told me that it was frightful for a leader-writer to have to be jogged so as to recall the name of the Prime Minister, and I told him that it was frightful for a managing editor to think that Oliver Goldsmith was one of the fill-up writers on his staff."

"I don't understand," said Ruth ; so Brough told the Goldsmith story, and she saw life so excessively comic that she felt fit to tackle all her correspondence, and looked at her wrist watch.

"I've been up here over an hour !" she said. "Never mind. I've not visited the pigeons since I saw you here."

"Have you not ? Neither have I," said Brough. He raised the trap for her and she descended.

"I think I'll stay up a little while," he began, and then, looking down on her as she glanced up at him, "Oh no, I'll come down too," he said.

CHAPTER X : LOVE AS DEMENTIA

DEMURELY did Miss Winter, as she walked ahead of Brough along the corridor, look over her shoulder and say : “ Good-afternoon.”

Brough, ten yards or so to rear, bowed and replied solemnly, “ Good-afternoon,” for both were returning to what are esteemed the Realities.

Then, behind Ruth, and ahead of Brough, out of her private room (the room which had been Ruth’s till recently) came Miss Ettie Wilson.

“ Oh, there you are, Mr Brough, I’ve been looking for you,” she said.

Brough, flicking his hands free of the blent detritus of pigeons’ wings, old corn, old wheat, inquired : “ And what can I do for you ? ” He followed her into the room.

Hardly had they entered when a boy arrived, self-consciously bearing a full cup of tea in a sloppy saucer, now flicking a look at them and anon at a plate balanced a-top the teacup, which served the dual purpose of keeping the tea moderately warm in transit and keeping dry the

three biscuits—one wafer, one cracknel, and one ginger.

“Lovely colour scheme !” trilled Ettie. “Thank you, Tommy. Had your tea, Mr Brough ?”

“No—it will be waiting, I expect. It’s after four now.”

“I’ve put it at the side of your desk,” said the boy. “Shall I bring——”

“Yes, bring it in here for him,” Ettie ordered, “do, Tommy. Look here, Mr Brough, I wish you would help me. I’ve got to get headings for a pile of things and I simply can’t think what to suggest, and you know the artists——” She left the phrase in air with a “don’t you know ?” to keep it still tethered. She handed the articles to Brough.

“Do sit down. Picture headings, don’t you know ?”

“No, no, you sit down,” said Brough.

“Go on ! I’ll sit on the table.”

Managing editors, as a rule, don’t like women to go on like this in an office, asking advice of young men who have not absolutely hard and fast time-tables of work, or definite posts, such as editor of this, or assistant editor of the other. The young man is apt to imagine that if he is not the

managing editor in actuality he is a kind of consulting editor.

Brough's tea came in. It was in a meaningless condition and needed a cigarette to give it tone.

"I'll have one, please," said Ettie, and as he looked at the proofs she toyed with the cigarette.

He sipped his alleged tea and glanced through the galleys that required illustrated heads, while Ettie, poised upon the table, held two fingers up erect and a cigarette between them. Cromarty, passing by, considered, with a puckered mouth, that the tobacco would have no deleterious effect upon her.

A pitter-patter of feet that spoke anxiety followed the elastic steps of Cromarty. Blandley went past along the corridor and then, at the gallop, came back again. His unmistakable cough announced his passage to Brough. It half drew Brough from his reading. For a brief second he raised his head, then bent again to find something in the proofs that read at all hopeful from the point of view of a "striking" heading. Presently, a little puzzled by the continual coming and going of Blandley, as a man may at last rise from a chair on the lawn and look desperately for a blue-bottle, Brough clutched the proofs nervously, and gave ear.

Ettie grew talkative. She became witty. Brough held the galley slips on his knee and looked up to laugh at some piece of gossip, delivered with all the snap of an “*on dit* par.”

“Have you heard the latest about the proprietor?” she asked.

“What is it? One never knows what the latest may be.”

“He thinks that we have had too many biographies of famous men in *The Weekly Man* and suggests biographies of famous battles.”

Blandley’s cough went by again, and the patter of his feet.

“Round and round the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran,” thought Brough. “But why?”

“Look here,” he said, “let me take these galley slips. I’ll get you headings for them all right.”

“Oh, you are sweet!” she said. “Not troubling you too much?”

“Not a bit.”

When Brough again entered the room that he shared with Blandley he found his colleague sitting sternly there, thrusting out his chin and frowning his brows, and touching with thumb and forefinger the sharp tips of his waxed moustache. He really should have converted Brough to the theory that

in moments of mental strain all men do not become impassive of feature.

But Blandley had really been awaiting the return of Brough. He had his course of action clear in his mind, line of argument, cut and dry as a synopsis.

"Brough," he said, "I want to talk to you."

"Yes?"

"I want to tell you that I am in love with Miss Ettie Wilson."

All the office knew that Cromarty, the chief, was a wag. But Blandley!

Brough stared.

"What do you think of her?" asked Blandley, in so harsh a voice that Brough doubted if there was waggishness.

"Well—I think she's a very clever girl," he suggested.

"Brough! Brough!" the serial story writer spoke low, "we have been colleagues, Brough, we have been colleagues for some time now—and I want you to know that I am in love with Ettie Wilson. You look upon her as a clever whet-article writer. I look upon her as—as what you," he scoffed, "if ever you loved a woman, would doubtless call the quintessence of the light that never shone on sea or shore."

The simple and material solution of liquor suggested itself to Brough, but Blandley had not been drinking. He had been working, as Brough knew, all day. Perhaps this was overwork: Brough began to perceive that here was undoubtedly real feeling. Accustomed to be looked upon himself as one mad, or going mad, he dismissed from his mind the succeeding explanation which took shape in his mind that Blandley was perhaps insane. To be called mad by others is one thing; but to think the others are mad, is, he recalled, a sure sign of insanity. And he did not wish to be insane according to canons. And yet, to him, Blandley did decidedly seem deranged. His eyes started—he—in short, Brough considered that if he could take a note of him then the note would be of great service when writing the next instalment of his “True” story of the Lancashire Lass and Lord Nod’s Infatuation.

“I mean it!” Blandley snapped.

“Yes, yes—I’m sure you do,” said Brough, in soothing accents.

“Don’t you understand me, sir? I appeal to your sense of honour. She would never, never look at you, in the full sense of that term; but she is trying to use you to irritate me. And I have proposed

marriage to her for years, periodically—every first Monday in the month.”

Brough murmured to himself, remembering the world’s verdict : “ Brough, my poor boy, you are insane ; you are mad,” and to Blandley he bowed.

Then for some cause Brough’s mouth slackened. So did Blandley’s. They grinned at each other across the table like two gargoyles.

“ She is like all women,” said Blandley, more collected. “ She wishes to be pursued—pursued—pursued. But it is absurd. Journalists and actors are two classes of men who should be allowed to dispense with all these usages——”

“ With the expression of the simple human emotions,” said Brough, seeing light.

“ With the expression, yes. Our lives are occupied in pandering to these things. But to the histrionic and the imaginative such as ”—he decided that he would flatter Brough for once—“ *us*,” he said definitely, “ the gilt is off the gingerbread. But there you are ! They demand pursuit. I love her deeply, madly ! But she is so sure of me that she never accepts. I believe you, now, are the kind of man who would rest content in offering your heart to a woman and think nothing of whether she accepted or not ! Oh, dear me ! Miss Wilson likes the sense

of freedom. She knows that sooner or later she can have me——”

“I see,” said Brough; but I doubt if he did. Blandley fell silent, and John remarked: “But—but—it must be rather unpleasant for her to be proposed to—periodically—in the office—is it in the office you propose?”

“Yes. But I want to tell you. The other day I decided to end it. I walked into her room, stepped up to her desk, where she sat writing her confounded novel——”

“What!” said Brough.

“Novel. And I said, ‘Miss Wilson, I have come to give you the last chance!’”

“What! Oh yes, quite so,” Brough said.

“Yes. And she rose up very haughtily and said, ‘I don’t understand.’ So I tapped the top of her roll-top desk in a definite manner, and I said, ‘I have asked you to marry me times without number. I see now that I was mistaken. Proposal is not acceptance. But now I offer you the last chance to accept.’ She said, ‘What do you mean?’ and I replied, ‘I will not come again to offer you my hand and heart. This is final and I mean it. You are now getting the chance. Before it was different; I was giving myself the chance.’”

Blandley stopped and mopped his forehead, relieving the anguish of the moment.

“What did she say?” and Brough’s voice now was husky. I am sure there is a strain of rightness in the manner of these serial stories that he loathed, and that are lost in the W. D. & H. files.

“Oh! She tried to be haughty. She said, ‘Thank you. Now I understand. Thank you!’ and remained standing, till I left, very erect.”

“She must have looked rather splendid,” Brough opined. He looked apoplectic.

“She looked like a tragedy queen,” said Blandley, and his voice broke. “And now! Now I am ignoring her. And one day she will come to me.”

Brough was silent.

“What are you thinking about?” said Blandley sharply. “Don’t you see my plan of campaign? I suppose you would not have acted so? Perhaps I might not have done so either, but I overheard the maker-up of *The Daily One* saying to a man—he did not know I was near—saying to a man, ‘Blandley is one of the best men in the office, but he lacks the one thing needful. He should cultivate the Napoleonic qualities. He should not ask so much. He should take.’ That is really why I acted so.”

Brough heaved a sigh. He knew that spectacled

maker-up. Every office has one of the type—a dry stick of a man who loves the ridiculous, and if there is a lull in the ridiculous around him he blows gently upon it and sets it aflame, and then twinkles through his spectacles at the absurd conflagration of his making.

“It’s a shame,” thought Brough.

“Remember!” cried Blandley. “There’s another girl I could have for the asking—sure and certain—but she looks delicate. She might mean a doctor’s bill, and journalists have to think of these things.”

Brough decided that it was not a shame after all.

“You love her too?” he asked.

“In a way.”

“Then,” suggested Brough dryly, “I think I would be inclined to advise you to marry her.”

“Eh?”

“To nurse her,” said Brough pathetically.

“Oh, you! Dry nurse! O Lord!” cried Blandley. “What would you—come now—what would you have done about Ettie Wilson?”

“By the Lord Harry!” cried Brough, “I’d never have pestered the poor girl in the office on first and third Mondays.”

“ First Mondays ! ”

“ First Mondays, then. If I had loved her I should have gone to her room and said, ‘ Miss Wilson, I have an important matter to lay before you ; but as I don’t wish to worry you and make your berth here unpleasant, and prevent you caring to come in for your salary, might I ask if I could have tea with you to-night and lay something before you ? ’ ”

Blandley rose and whooped : “ Oh, you ass ! Oh, you incompetent ! ”

Brough looked up, wondering why he was esteemed an ass.

“ I’m afraid I’m not interested in your love affairs,” he said, seeing how things were shaping.

“ And yet,” mused Blandley, settling again, “ there’s something in your impossible idea too. You’re as idiotically romantic as the most romantic woman. I think—I think perhaps I’ll try that scheme later on. I don’t know—it’s such blethering stupidity that it might ensnare her.”

“ Ensnare ! Ensnare ! Hang it all, sir, don’t talk to me as if I was selling you bird-lime to catch linnets.”

“ Oh, wait till you fall in love,” cried Blandley.

“ I hope I shall woo like a gentleman,” said Quixote Brough.

“You can’t,” said Blandley. “No man can. Love and gentlemanliness are anomalous.”

The door opened and Miss Wilson popped her head in.

“Oh, Mr Brough,” said she, “you won’t forget *that* for me ?”

“No,” said Brough, “no, Miss Wilson, I’ll remember.”

After she had closed the door, and the sound of her feet had departed along the corridor, the two men sat and stared at each other like gargoyles again. Then Blandley rose suddenly, snatched his hat, and said : “Good-night !”

He dashed toward the door and it opened again, to admit Cromarty.

“Hullo !” said the chief.

Blandley recovered.

Cromarty put a hand on Blandley’s shoulder and bent his head, imitating the air of a gently censoring bachelor. Fathers of twins have a liking for such byplay. He waggled a finger at Brough, who sat like an effigy at his desk.

Blandley and Brough awaited the bantering that Cromarty’s air announced as on the wing. Cromarty shook his head. He shook it at Blandley.

“ Ah, Blandley,” he said. “ Do you not feel a sense of your responsibilities ? ”

Blandley gave a little giggle and clutched his pipe tightly.

“ You should advise him,” said Cromarty, still to Blandley. “ Look at his eyes. They tell his state. He will be falling in love before he knows where he is, and there will be speech-makings and presentations of a clock, or an inkstand ! ”

“ Poof ! ” said Blandley.

Then he laughed. He laughed till he coughed and held his stomach.

“ Brough,” and Cromarty winked the eye which Blandley could not see, and wagged his finger, “ you must beware of the attraction of brilliance. You will only have your heart broken.” He winked again with great solemnity.

But whether Cromarty was trying to do what is variously called “ having him on,” “ getting him on toast,” “ joshing,” ragging, twitting, quizzing, whether Cromarty was making levity of Blandley’s fiery amours for the sheer joy of seeing him perspire more, sheer devilish joy in torture of the innocent—or guilty ; or whether he hoped to rout away Blandley’s infatuation thus, and render him normal again, Brough could not tell.

He suspected the latter intention when the chief turned to Blandley with a new expression, and said :

“Blandley, you smoke too much. You should come and have a round of golf with me to-night. My house looks out on the course, you know. Come along.”

“I—er——” Blandley began.

“Come along you, too, Brough.”

“I have an engagement or else I should be very happy,” said Brough.

Blandley turned his head slowly and looked at his colleague as a man looks on an egg of which he is suspicious.

Cromarty could hardly stifle his merriment. That was evident in the extreme gravity of his jaw and the wide glare of his eyes. He had the effrontery to wink at Brough again, and to give a little accompanying jerk of his head toward Blandley, as if to say : “Isn’t it astounding ?”

But they all passed out together.

“Which way do you go, Brough ?” asked Cromarty.

Blandley looked at Brough furtively. He wondered if he was going out to dinner with Ettie.

“Don’t look at him like that, Blandley ! You look as if you thought he was going off to get drunk.”

“I was thinking a round of golf would do *him*

good," Blandley said. "Half-a-minute till I get some tobacco," and he plunged into a tobacconist's shop.

Cromarty pursed his lips and looked at Brough.

"He'll go mad if he doesn't look out. Isn't it queer how a man like him, sensible enough on things, gets hag-ridden by a beautiful woman? It's not fair on the woman! He'll go barmey on the crum-pet. It's a form of insanity. He thinks you've got an assignation with Ettie Wilson."

"Never!"

"Yes—that's what's on his mind."

"You—you were having him on?"

"I! I was trying to ridicule him into sense. I ended by deciding I'd be wiser to get him to come and play golf. You mark my words—when he comes out of that shop he'll have changed his mind. He'll have remembered an important engagement. And really what he will do is track all round the restaurants in London looking for a man with stubbly fair hair and a long hatchet face sitting opposite a picture hat. And he'll think every woman he meets is Ettie Wilson, and——"

Blandley returned.

"I say, Cromarty, I've just remembered a prior engagement," he said.

“Oh, well,” said Brough, with an inspiration, “then I’ll come with you, Cromarty. You can’t be done out of your golf. I’ll let my engagement go.”

As a matter of fact, his “engagement” was with himself. Like many a sailor (mercantile marine, that is) he had never learnt to swim, and had decided to go to the Saint Bride’s baths and learn that very night.

Blandley considered.

“Let me see—Tuesday—Wednesday—no, of course—I’ve not an engagement. Not to-night. I’m glad! We’ll all go. Let us all go!” he cried hilariously.

Brough and Cromarty looked each to each in horror, each took an arm of Blandley’s, and led him to a taxi that slid along Fleet Street close to the kerb alert for a fare. All went home together to Cromarty’s house, where poor Blandley sat and looked pensively at the latest twins and was thrilled to the heart when one of them, by accident, gurgled at him and called him “Daddy!” As he tramped round the course later, jeopardising larks and sheep, the infant’s voice gurgled still in his heart.

Cromarty could do nothing for him.

CHAPTER XI : MAPLETON WILD—"WHET-MAN"

MAPLETON WILD, chief "whet-man" for the W. D. & H. house, had come, like many of his fellows, less or more brilliant, from the North Country, from one of its solid and smoky cities where he had been apprenticed, in the natural order of things, to a firm of manufacturers.

In the great grey block of buildings owned by that firm, he had been the office boy for one year, learning there the first stages of book-keeping by taking out of the petty cash box, happily, if a little incredulously, whatever money the petty-cash book showed as over at half-past five at night, or refunding ruefully, out of his own pocket, the sum shown as short. This method was simpler than the one explained to him by the cashier.

At the beginning of his second year he was put into one of the departments.

I describe his part in these early movements as I would if I were telling of the movements of a bale of cloth. He did not go into the office ; he was put there. He did not pass into the department ; he

was sent thither. There he performed the usual work ; dabbed out of samples of wincey, with pen and ink, whatever white flaws showed up ; and stunned his department head one day by looking up from that venal task to inquire, being a youngster of imagination : “ Shall we have to dab every piece of wincey this way, if these samples bring in orders ? ”

In the evenings he employed himself variously : by attending the chapel literary society ; by reading Keats in his bedroom ; or by walking in the park and looking at the girls.

He used to buy a great many more books than his home folks thought necessary for a young man in business.

On the chest of drawers in his bedroom he had a little row of books. The objection to them, of his people, was not at all the objection to them that he, later, when he had read more and attained a less eclectic view of literature, entertained toward some of them.

They objected to them because they were books.

Also, they saw these books triumphing, if not in individual bulk, at least in area covered, looking upon them in the mass, over the Holy Bible, and “ A Concordance to the Holy Scriptures,” and “ Hymns A. and M.”

The books were, as far as he remembered ten years later, "Ballads in Blue China," in a dainty little volume, parchment paper, beautiful calf covers, with a frontispiece by Abbey; "Rhymes à la Mode," in a dainty little volume, parchment paper, beautiful calf covers, with a frontispiece by Abbey; "On Viol and Flute," in a dainty little volume, parchment paper, beautiful covers, with a frontispiece by Alma Tadema; W. E. Henley's "Song of the Sword and other Verses"; Le Gallienne's "Prose Fancies I."; "Sonnets of this Century" (Canterbury Series), since called "Sonnets of the Nineteenth Century"; "Letters to Dead Authors"; "Omar Khayyam"; Shelley's "Adonais." When these books, with others added to their rank (titles forgotten ten years later), made a file that stretched more than half-way across the top of the chest of drawers, his folks suggested retrenchment.

One evening when he was out, either at the church literary society or strolling in the park—the park scented with cigarettes and flowers—they looked inside the volumes, to find out, on the fly-leaves, how much they had cost. James M. Wild had forestalled them, in most cases, with india-rubber. But they made a computation. They delivered a lecture. The result was that future books bought

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by James M. Wild were put behind this row that had already been pawed over and examined for monetary extravagance. When the rear rank stretched from end to end, the two ranks were brought forward by young Wild and a third rank of recruits began to fall in behind.

But he who acknowledges a master must be prepared for censure as well as praise.

Still—the house was not dusted. It was spring-cleaned. Detection might have been delayed. But the third row stretched all the way along the chest of drawers long before the coming of spring with crocuses in the parks. A fourth row had to be begun.

This brought the books so prominently into the light of day, dominating the basin, the ewer set in the basin, the crockery below, the slop-pail and the two texts (the first a statement ; the second meaningless in its frame, out of its context—" God is love " and " Rock of Ages "—the swinging mirror, the hair-brush with the bone back on which was inscribed " A Present from the Isle of Man "), that another lecture was delivered—this time on a dual text, for here there was acting with a wish to deceive as well as book-buying.

It was when Wild reached the age of nineteen that the Great Event befell.

Mapleton Wild, or Jim Wild, it was supposed by his folks, had not only become a member of the Post Office Savings Bank, but was using the bank for banking. Post Office Savings Bank books are, according to the bank rules, sent in to the head office annually. An inquiry was made of young Wild if he had sent up his book this year, and the reply was a blush.

The book was exhumed.

It told a tragic tale of a struggle to save—or a tale of a spendthrift nature—or both—there are various ways of seeing life.

It is surely a sign of how little imagination his people had, that they, who had once computed the cost of his "library," did not suspect that books might be the chief cause of these pathetic little insidiously accumulative withdrawals after every resolute deposit. Neck-ties and wide cuffs had their share, of course, in the depletion that had ended in bankruptcy, also the "latest" in bowler hats. But young Wild was cross-questioned over the damning bank-book. Bitterly he considered that his mother looked like God and his father like the Keeper of the Books.

"What have you been doing with your money?" came the voice.

He dared not say : “ Buying books.”

He remained tongue-tied, fingering the top of his latest friend, a volume of Matthew Arnold’s poems that stood, erect and dignified, with all its sad lucidity, in his side pocket.

He went a little hot when the next question came :

“ Have you been drinking ale with the lads in the ware’us ? ”

“ No,” he said thickly.

Then :

“ Is it women ? ”

He went white as paper, cold as a frog. He fingered the Arnold for solace.

“ Yes, in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone.”

He ! He who welcomed all that long time of the tramcar journey to business and back, using it to write, or try to write, “ A Sonnet to the Soul of Jenny Walker,” a young lady whom he had met at a church conversazione and with whom he had there exchanged conversation lozenges, a young lady who may or may not have had a soul, but was certainly hugely tickled at the position he gave her in his thoughts.

But Mapleton Wild, aged nineteen, out-Launceloted Launcelot.

His eyes filled with tears.

"Ah! That's it!" he heard.

The tears passed away immediately and he had an attack of hysterics. He rushed to his bedroom. He swore like a carman. He blasphemed God. He derided baptism. He told how he had seen the curate opening the camisole of one of the contraltos after choir practice, and peeping in, which might have been a simple action had his profession been the medical, but from a priest was sinister. From priests of God he passed back again to their God. Then language failed him. He took up the present from the Isle of Man and, using it as a mallet, he smashed the "Rock of Ages." He snatched up the ewer and flung it at the other text, bringing down text and ewer in ruin. He dived down for the other crockery and sent it full into the shavings and silver paper that filled the grate. Loud was the noise thereof; and he felt immense. Then, for some reason, he rushed to the chest of drawers and with a succession of sweeps of his arm discharged the four files of volumes over the floor—his father and mother standing outside in the passage, peering in at him like two craning giraffes.

Eventually he sat down on the over-turned slop-pail and wept.

They left him then, to God and contrition, and waited for his coming forth, intending to admonish him then, when he might not look so dangerous.

But he did not ever come out to the corridor. He knotted his blankets and sheets together and went out over window in the ancient way. He ran round to his father's oldest friend, restrained the tendency to something like Saint Vitus' dance which he still felt, and delivered a bogus message from his father, explaining that the brokers were in and begging for ten pounds.

His father's oldest friend said he could only manage five, but that he would call round in the morning.

That night young Wild fled to London, like Chatterton ; and at sight of the pall over London his heart—sank. He looked forward to dying as Chatterton died. But he had to live, if only to refund that five pounds. And he did so—two years later.

His early adventures would make a book ; his living upon a quarter of a pound of nuts a day, broken under heel on the Embankment ; his writing of little verses, price five shillings, on Sweet Nancy whose neck was like a swan's and such themes—

for as a poet he was quite normal and acceptable ; these appeared in such papers as—— But he does not mention them now, and neither need I.

At the time he strolls into this narrative he lived in a pretty stucco villa in Kent, with sun-blinds stretching out over all the windows and flowering cherry strewing the path in its season ; just far enough out of London to see, from his top windows, the flaming gorse of a common, to have the scent and sight of lilac and laburnum each in its season ; and yet close enough to get into town, if at any time necessary, by half-past ten.

He lived happily here, a widower now, with a little daughter, Doris, his best " pal."

My readers know the kind of locality—where the accents of the Cockney and the countryman meet ; and the charge of the stucco villas sweeps around the thatched house ; and cows, homeward bound to the farm, startle stockbrokers' wives in the family way.

The name of his house was " Rus in Urbe," very neatly painted on the miniature pillars on either side of the gate.

Here he sat now, in the study of " Rus in Urbe," before his desk.

The man, as seen before the world, might have his

inconsistencies ; he might be prone to draw to him panderers and flatterers, in place of friends, a trait common to many of his kind. He might, highly sensitive, discard one of these flatterers whose flattery had gone just one step over the border, sufficiently far to allow of Wild's understanding, ruefully, that this sycophant was exploiting his egotism. Also might he misconstrue some friend's suggestion to him that he should abstain from lending himself to the panderers, from putting himself at the mercy of less-sensitive men, misconstrue that advice, look upon it not as a hint that he was big enough to stand alone, but as a suggestion that he was a small man, and one easily hoodwinked.

Then would his chest swell, and he announce to his portrait in the overmantel mirror that he was a great man but had been unwise in his friendship, taken to his breast, if not an asp—he would not go so far as that—one regarding whom he must reconstruct his opinions. The editor of *Quidnuncs*—politician and big-game hunter—who said of him “very well-meaning but incapable of understanding,” had doubtless been interviewed by Wild, so that there was excuse for that calumny.

But if discarded flatterer or pigeonholed friend fell ill, and it was discovered that the sick man was

not a member of any journalists' society, Wild, silk-hatted for the occasion, and carrying an ebony cane (alleged as having been sported by Barbey D'Aurevilly), "picked up" in a curio shop of the Quai Voltaire during a week-end in Paris, strutted bombastic and vociferous and with booming voice (but altogether forgivable, for so obviously boyish) through the editorial world, collecting half-crowns—to send on by another hand "from the boys." That was a phrase to which the editor of *Quidnuncs* objected as "well-meaning, but somewhat Bœotian."

For example, one Friday at his club, in response to one of his orations upon Oscar Wilde (the writer of that delightful comedy *The Importance of Being Earnest*), which had ended with the words, "my great namesake," a man had remarked: "He spelt his name with a final 'e,' did he not?—one small letter, but how great the lack!" Mapleton Wild had made that foolish finale to his oration (which, to be sure, was not so bad for an oration, a little more critical, much less slushy than many orations upon the same text) with a boyish smile gleaming through his magnificence. The smile was intended to atone for presumption—if presumption were seen. Many greater men than Mapleton Wild have mounted over the birth of an idea lest others might

laugh it to scorn ; and anon, after the laughter has died, how seriously have they turned to the task of calling, what they laughed at, a serious gospel.

Upon the Friday Mapleton Wild blotted from his books of remembrance that sneering sub-editor. Upon the Sunday the sub-editor—who had not been fobbed off by the smile, too serious or too petty, I don't know—was run over by a dray in Chancery Lane. By Wednesday Wild had collected a small fortune, from the point of view of a sub-editor's widow, to send to her “from his old colleagues” (for the words of the editor of *Quidnuncs* upon the use of the phrase “the boys” had come to Wild's ears) “with their esteem for him and you.”

All these things serve for an idea of the kind of man this was whom you now see before his desk in the study of “*Rus in Urbe*.”

Before him, on his desk, a little statuette of Pan, horns, laugh, and cloven hoof, whistling upon his “case of whistles,” danced over a budget of proofs awaiting correction.

Whatever the quality of Mapleton Wild's work, at least he loved it in his sumptuous way. Above his desk there was a shelf containing all his manuscripts, elegantly bound in panelled calf.

Doris's doll lay upon one chair, last week's

Between Two Stools on another; yesterday's *The Daily Paper*, on another, lay open at the literary page, which contained a glittering article by Mapleton Wild upon "Toby Jugs."

He was able to write an article on anything or nothing with one hand, while the other (on the little finger of which were a woman's rings—engagement ring, a hoop ring twinkling with diamonds and rubies—and a woman's wedding ring) held an edge of his daughter's skirt, while she, standing on his chair, or, inadvertently, upon his thighs, put his auburn halo into bows and generally rumbled him. He had decided, seven years ago, nearly, watching her one day, tapping his teeth with thumb nail—a sign of deep emotion such as never was shown by any character in Blandley's serials—never to have another child. If the state paid him a million pounds to have one it would make no difference. Lover of song and sunburnt mirth though he was, moved easily to abandon, and his spirit tossed, like trees, in spring winds, the mystery within that pink and romping shell appalled him often. His eyes had been seen to go moist once when he recalled two lines of a poem in one of these books of his early days :

“ And who shall reckon what lives may live
In the life that we bade to be? ’ ”

That was years ago, nearly seven years ago. And now, often, as he worked, he would pause and look out of his casement at the trees against the sky, and give ear to the birds chirping and singing ; and his face would be heavy with many reveries that were not of himself.

But set him before a glass of wine in a café corner and he would, if the simile be not too far-fetched (I do not think it is, for such immense emotions), bathe in an empurpled sea, every wave of which was some inspired thought culled out of literature.

To-day he was busily employed upon a panegyric on a Great Soldier. By his side lay many newspaper cuttings which had come to him by the morning's post accompanied by a letter which read :

“ MY DEAR WILD,—Let me have three and a half columns, signed, upon the General. I enclose cuttings regarding his life and recent affairs to give you the bones.” (“ Let these dry bones live ! ” Wild had interjected, reading the note.) “ I am sorry to rush you ; but must ask copy to be here by Wednesday A.M. Yours, etc.,

“ ALGERNON CROMARTY.”

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While he was employed upon this task he heard the garden gate click and, looking up abruptly at the sound, saw John Brough, meditative of carriage, entering his domain.

CHAPTER XII : LOVE AS LYRIST

MAPLETON WILD ushered the acting editor of *Between Two Stools* into his den ; and, with a polished apology, marched out to the great room at back of the house, used as a nursery, to see that Doris was not, perchance, trying to teach a batch of yester-days kittens to swim, for, like most children of seven years, she had an innocent love of such deeds.

Brough awaited his return, wandering round the study into which he had been ushered, and considering that the carpet was reminiscent of holidays in moorland country, so buoyant, so resilient was it under his feet. Delightedly he considered the spirit of the room. The first specific object to allure him was a charcoal drawing of Claude Monet, the French Impressionist, in sweater and sabots, and leaning upon an oaken cudgel ; he looked like a man leading something very like *The Ideal Life*. Brough's conception of leading an ideal life was to be a sailor before the mast and a dilettante in a library !

It struck Brough that the lady of the pigeon-loft would like that drawing. He detached his gaze from

it, however, to seek for other joys for himself and, in doing so, probably came to a better understanding of Mapleton Wild.

Many books reposed in shelves: Nietzsche, Bergson, Weininger, stood side by side with a framed menu-card from a Soho restaurant over them.

A vast number of Latin classics bound in calf and with gold titles made one wall sumptuous—Cicero and Tacitus on one shelf, and, below, Ausonius, Symmachus, Petronius, Claudian. If Brough had slipped out one of the quarto volumes of Cicero or Tacitus he would have found that the cover was stamped with the gold crest of a house in the library of which all that set, once upon a time, had reigned. But that was long ago, and they had all come into Wild's hands by way of the auction room. Over them was a photograph of Mapleton Wild, as Apollo, at an artists' ball in Paris.

A Bible, that it pleased Wild to imagine was bound in human skin, though it was really pigskin, a very heavy tome, too, reclined upon an old three-legged stool, which, if it could not be called the stool of Jenny Geddes, was of her epoch.

On another shelf was a row of books of lives—life of St Francis of Assisi, of Savonarola, of Santa Teresa, of Cellini. There must have been something

delightfully playful about Mapleton Wild, Brough considered, when he saw Plutarch's "Lives" there also, re-bound austere in calf, but with the words, in gold, upon the back, "Plutarch—Imaginary Portraits."

Below these volumes were two shelves of books that showed whence came the authority of Popes, inquiries into the origin of the Rosary and so forth ; and over all, on that side, was an engraving of Christ scourging the money-changers from the Temple.

In a corner of his study, for it was too sacred to be left in the umbrella-stand, stood the lustrous walking-cane, with ivory head, which he had bought in a bric-à-brac shop on the Quai Voltaire, Paris. The proprietor of that, to Wild, exciting establishment had assured him that the cane had once been the property of Barbey D'Aurevilly.

On the mantelshelf there stood a photograph of a woman with a very pretty and puzzled face, the photograph of her who had been the mother of Doris and had now been gone hence such a long while that Doris had resigned herself not to expect a miraculous return, but blew a kiss to her every night in place of saying prayers—for Mapleton Wild could not find it in his heart to teach Doris to pray to a God he could not fathom, and he thought her as yet

not old enough to suggest that she pray to herself. She was a very sweet child too.

That photograph stood at one end ; in the centre was a jade Nirvana with a tiny jet crucifix hanging from the neck ; at the other end a Pan, larger and more dissolute than that upon the desk.

Brough heard a door close to rear of the house and turned to regreet his host, feeling glad, as he did so, that Wild was in his brown tweeds.

With the silk hat Wild wore the gold-rimmed monocle. With the blue, well-pressed lounge suit he wore the tortoiseshell. Dressed in his loose brown tweeds he used the unmounted monocle. And Brough liked him best in homespun and unmounted monocle. Then he seemed more in the mood that he must surely have been in when he set up the charcoal drawing of Claude Monet in that dim corner—that drawing of a man in sweater and sabots leaning on an oaken or ash cudgel, beholding the wonder of light among beech and birch woods, loving the sunlit world, with thoughtful visage, contemplative mien, wearing an air of dignified and easy rusticity.

Mapleton Wild entered the room.

“Apollo,” said Brough, “I am considering the marriage question.”

“ Personally or theoretically ? ” asked Wild, immediately alert, and apparently unastonished at this abrupt beginning.

“ Theoretically—but very deeply,” Brough replied, seating himself.

“ That means personally,” Wild responded, with a certain pride in the chic reply.

“ Should a man marry ? ” asked Brough.

“ No man should be weak,” his host fenced.

Brough gazed on nothing in particular, with blind eyes.

“ You can conceive of a man being in the position of wishing to be of service to a woman,” he suggested.

“ You are trying to give reasons for emotion,” Wild announced, as if casting a light into the unplumbed recesses of Brough’s consciousness. “ Are you also, like most men, to be gulled by that old idea of woman as the weaker vessel, whom you will guard from all chippings, as you would guard a porcelain figure ? ”

Brough thought of his white lady. Wild looked furtively upon his desk statuette of Pan for aid.

“ I assure you, whoever she is, she can get along without your protection,” said Wild. “ She has got along so far fairly well I take it ? ”

“ True ! ” Brough admitted, in amazement.

“ But perhaps, inquiring deeper, you could not bear to see her in another’s arms ? ” asked Wild, and winked secretly to the Pan on his mantelshelf.

Brough leapt up.

“ If the man was good to her ! If she was well-treated ! I could go on then ”—a trill of thrush song came through the window—“ listening to the birds alone,” he said, and sat down again.

Wild experienced a check. He scrutinised Brough and saw that Brough’s face was that of a man agonised ; he recognised that, in spirit, or in theory, Brough had already resigned this disturbing woman and felt the pang.

Wild was glad. Brough, he thought, was better dreaming than disillusioned—and Ettie Wilson would bring disillusion to him.

“ Let us go out and continue *en plein air*,” he said. “ That is a pretty big affection for a woman that would let a man be willing to do without her.”

“ It is sincere,” said Brough.

“ Yes, I can see it is,” said Wild, and, slightly tidying his desk before departing, he picked up the little Pan and smiled at it and set it down, very much in the manner in which you may have seen, in some restaurant of London, a dining damsel look in a

little mirror, plucked forth from her chatelaine, scrutinised and popped back again, before tipping the waiter and surging out like Aphrodite.

They passed out into the road, under the red sunset.

“There is still hope for you,” Wild continued ; “for when a man asks advice from another in a love affair it is a pretty clear sign that the answer is *Don’t*.”

“It all depends what man he asks advice from,” said Brough, without any thought of flattery, falling in step with the great man ; and Wild was flattered. “And, besides, it is not advice I want exactly,” said Brough ; and Wild thought that it must be something melancholy in the sunset that then depressed him.

“I thought you wanted to discuss the matter with me,” he said, with a note of austerity.

“No ; I wanted to talk to you about life—and death. I see the days come and go—sunsets like this ! And I love that dear woman—and she and I are going to die some day and—life will be going on.”

Wild felt the moment dramatic and quoted :

“ ‘And who shall reckon what lives may live
In the life that we bade to be ? ’ ”

“Well, put it that way,” Brough allowed. “I should think it terrible to know when one lies a-dying that life will be going on and on ; and we who kept it a-going shall have no power to help those who suffer. But, apart from that, you know, Wild——” He stuck. “It’s difficult to speak at all under this sunset. It seems unnecessary. Only someone who had got out of touch with the sunset could fail to understand. Yes, there are people who had better never have been born ; people who have not the knack to cope with the struggle of existence——”

“And people,” said Wild feelingly, “who can’t stand the sweets—‘the sweetness of the world—edged like a sword.’”

“Yes, yes, quite so. But it’s this, Wild. We are all walking on the ensanguined edge.”

Wild took a great breath.

“Why ensanguined ?” he asked.

“From deaths of our forerunners.”

“Can’t you tight-rope walk it ?” asked Wild. “No ?” For Brough shook his head. “Ah ! I have hope for you yet. I thought at first that you were coming to me with some plan for settling. But I see you are drunken. And——”

“I ! I’m not !”

“ I don’t mean with liquor. I mean with your consciousness. The One Great Secret is never to be sober.”

Then they saw an old grey-headed woman sitting by the hedge, drunk with liquor, in the ditch, and she called out toothless ribaldries to them. They both shuddered.

“ Terrible ! Terrible ! When I see a sight like that I think how somewhere in the line of our descent, after us, will be, in one generation or another, some such sight. Not a score of happy loves can atone for one drunken woman in the ditch.” So spoke Brough ; and Wild shuddered, for he thought of the owner of the doll on his study chair.

“ You’re right,” he said firmly. “ It gives one pause,” he added.

“ It settles the matter,” said Brough. “ Life is too tragic for love-making.”

“ You belong very acutely,” said Wild, “ to the age that asks why. And I believe it is right to ask why.”

They had come to one of the fascinating byways of that part of Kent ; and Wild glanced on along the road ahead of them, then glanced at the byway.

“ Wait,” he said, and felt in his breast pocket.

A homing labourer was climbing over the stile. He nodded to Wild, Wild to him ; and then, as the

labourer's heavy steps moved on along the highway, crossed it, and he dwindled in another field-path opposite, finding his way home through many song-filled meadows, Wild pointed to the stile.

“That being settled,” said he, “let me read you an article. The sonority of it will appeal to you.”

He withdrew from his breast pocket the panegyric on the Dead Soldier.

He began to read, sitting on the stile, facing the road.

Brough, leaning by his side and looking across the fields, saw, at top of a green crest, among trees, a whitewashed farm take on blues and purples in its white wall; saw an infinite number of twinkling spots of gold among the green trees round it; saw in the half stream, half ditch, at the bottom of the field, sunset glow reflected in water, as if in a golden mirror; saw, near at hand, where level rays swept through the pollard willows, little dancing clouds of gnats.

“If I go to see the ivy on the walls at Amen Corner she is there,” said Brough into the hum that he thought was of gnats and crickets, forgetting it was of Wild, reading his panegyric on a Dead Soldier.

Wild paused, affronted; then, like a god, was amused, and considered:

“The acting editor of *Between Two Stools* is anti-climacteric !”

“If I stroll into Fountain Court,” Brough went on, “I remember far less Charles Lamb putting his foot on the cock and turning the water on and off adroitly, pretending to his playmates that he was a conjurer who regulated the flow by ordering it ‘On !’ —‘Off !’”

“Where did you read that ? Where did you read that ? I never heard——”

“I don’t know,” said Brough, his manner as if he brushed away a fly. “What I was saying is that she is in the silence round the plane-tree in Staple Inn. She is the soaring and the flashes of the fountain in Fountain Court. She is the rustle of the ivy at Amen Corner. She is the summer sky over London. She is the haze about St Paul’s when you look up Ludgate Hill going to the office in the afternoon——”

“Is this rodomontade ?” asked Mapleton Wild.

“It is the simplest statement I can make of what I have felt for many years,” said Brough.

“Just like him,” thought Wild. “Ettie Wilson has been at the offices only about three years, I believe.”

“Many years ?” he asked.

“Many years,” said Brough. “But what I want to know is this : Is it my duty to say nothing of all this to her ? ”

Mapleton Wild looked with great affection on him.

“John Brough,” he said, “there are moments when I imagine I am Apollo. I may even admit that there have been moments when I thought that if I was not God I was at least no small potatoes. But you are speaking to a mere man. I cannot interfere.”

He put the panegyric back in his breast pocket. “I must leave you to whatever Deity taught you such speech.”

But he grieved that his gods would not grant him the sense, in his heart, that he was fit to say simply : “John Brough, don’t make an ass of yourself. If you and Ettie Wilson ever did marry she would go mad—and you would become sane.”

CHAPTER XIII : EPISODE OF A TOBY JUG

JOHN BROUGH was back at work, a very quiet man.

On all counts he had decided, in the words of *The Evening One's* back-page "feuilleton," that his lips must be sealed.

He was a man inclined to be introspective, because he had spent much time alone in the crowded world. Acquaintances he had, many. I daresay that, if he had landed upon the Mole at Valparaiso, some duck-suited, brass-buttoned sailor-body of the P.S.N.C. would have stepped up to him and said : " I say, are you not John Brough ? " If he had stepped off the Northern Pacific cars at Glendive, some man riding down the street would have pulled up in a swirl of dust and drawled : " Pardon me, sir. Am I right ? Why, sure ! " and with the blasphemous greeting of cowland would have gripped his hand and said, " I knew you would come back. What ah you drinking ? " If he had crossed the pampas at the tail-end of that long continent, from Santa Cruz southward, at lonely estancias there, old, dim-eyed Scotsmen, living solitary with their dogs and

sheep (and full of strange tales, once their tongues are loosened, tales of pumas and armadilloes and the tricks of wool-selling), would have remembered the youth and greeted the man with joy, finding him still youthful.

Sometimes he was possessed by an intense hunger to see again all the places he had seen of old.

He was still a rolling stone at heart. But, for the time being, he played his part in London and looked on at it.

He used often to wonder what Cromarty was like inside his head, what Blandley was like inside his—and Sanctley, and all the rest of them. Their actual lives as apart from what they did to buy food and clothes puzzled him.

Cromarty, he supposed, loved his wife. When the twins came along the doctor called them “little blessings”; some daring wag hung a baby pacifier upon the handle of Cromarty’s door. But if Cromarty arrived late and was snappy all day, instead of merely snappy in spasms and condoning in between, the solution was “little blessings.” His pastime was golf, and he played golf as if it was a habit. As for Blandley, “love” turned him into a blithering idiot. Brough could not see the connection between Cupid and the midwife. And yet it

seemed they were inseparable. For some cause or another, which readers may be able to explain, John Brough was beginning to look upon the domestic or marital side of the lives of his colleagues.

For some reason, too, he remained away from the pigeon-loft. But he knew why he remained away. He did so lest one day, if Ruth Winter were there, he might throw himself upon a knee (to the consternation of the pigeons) and say :

“ My dear, if you had been Helen, Troy had broken in flower instead of flame. I should like to have you bobbing along beside me right up to the end.”

And she might “ turn him down.” And then her life in the W. D. & H. offices would be unbearable to her. She would always be adread lest he might “ propose ” again ; not for worlds would he emulate Blandley’s plan of campaign.

So Brough was very distant with Miss Winter when business brought them together in the offices, and he never said “ Pigeons ” to her.

Two days after his visit to Wild, to discuss, not the object of his trouble, but the trouble of life (he being a thoughtful child of the age which asks “ why ? ”), he had to go to the British Museum to look up certain records, verifying, for Cromarty, statements made in an article that had been offered to Cromarty as ‘ an

exclusive.” If these statements were true the article was very much what was wanted. If they were spurious then the article was one very assiduously to be avoided. Brough discovered, after brief research, that the article was mendacious. So he left the museum by no means elated and eager to rush back to Cromarty. He walked out to the portico slowly, looked round to see that no one was close behind to receive the backward swing of the door, saw a woman behind, and held the door open.

He did not look at her. He had found that ladies are apt to tilt their heads in air haughtily if doors are held open for them and ask the holder to call a cab ; and he tried, to the best of his ability, while being gracious, to avoid seeing ungraciousness. If the door is not held open for them they have a tendency to join the suffragettes, and Brough knew that such a proceeding throws people into the midst of what is called “ politics ”—and God forbid that he should hasten any man or woman upon the way toward “ politics.” Better far that he should be treated like a menial. To be treated like a menial is, after all, only one side of the story.

This lady who came out erred upon the other side. She knew that there were cads in London town.

She had had one experience with them in a little episode of a lost dog. But she said "thank you" to the man who held the door open.

Brough recognised her voice, and she the Navajo ring upon the second finger of the hand that held the door wide. The recognitions synchronised.

So that was how Ruth and John crossed the pigeon-dotted yard together, and walked down Museum Street.

The day was brilliant and warm, with a wind to temper it ; and their progress was through a succession of slabs of sunlight, that came down on the pavements between overhanging shop blinds, and parallelograms of shadow under the blinds. It was a day of parasols and glinting harness and twinkling windows mirroring kaleidoscopic streets. They walked on, in a very pleasant atmosphere of wind-blown sunshine.

At the corner of Kingsway and Holborn Brough suggested a detour from the crowded thoroughfare of Holborn, and they turned aside from the roll of wheels, clatter of motor buses (that have changed the music of London, which once was very sweet, a ceaseless silvery tinkle), cries of "Bank ! Bank ! 'Pool Street ! 'Pool Street ! Where do ye wana go ? 'Ere ye are ! Get aht of it ! Hi ! Hi !" and

passed by side turnings into narrow ways in which the Present hushed itself and old wooden-fronted houses seemed trying to hide from the eyes of London County Council men who go about looking for them to pull them down.

There, at the window of a shop, the upper storey of which leant out on oaken supports, Brough stopped with an exclamation of joy ; for a ray of sunlight, peeping down into that narrow alley, shone directly upon a beautiful old snuffbox, and drew his gaze to it.

On the instant Brough decided that the snuffbox must be purchased. He raised his eyes and saw the shopman in the cool doorway.

“ How much is the snuffbox ? ” he asked.

“ Two guineas, sir.”

“ Ah ! ” said Brough. “ Thank you.”

“ Allow me to show it to you,” the owner implored, but with dignity.

“ No—no,” cried Brough, with the voice as of one begging that he be not turned aside, and that to turn him aside would be no difficult matter. “ Thank you,” and he walked on, the editress of *Lovely Woman* swinging along beside him.

“ I have only a guinea in my possession,” he said presently.

“So have I—exactly. I’ll lend you it.”

He hesitated ; and then—

“No—no. Thanks. But no—I would buy everything that glitters !”

Ruth looked at him anxiously, desirous to decide if he had decided not to buy the snuffbox. If he wanted it—if the real He wanted it—she would lend the guinea. If he felt that he should not buy it, then she would not undermine his resolve.

“Oh !”

It was Ruth who cried out. But there was no physical spasm of any kind behind that ejaculation. She had not twisted her ankle, nor had she been bumped in the eye by the board, on head, of a passing flower-seller ; though Brough first clutched her arm to support her and then cried out : “Did that man bump you with his board ?”

“No, no,” she said.

Her eyes were beaming upon a cameo brooch that reposed in the window of another bric-à-brac emporium.

“I wonder how much that costs,” said Ruth.
“Is it not perfect ?”

In imagination she could see it under her chin, holding her blouse close, and supporting a cascade of old lace.

“Let me ask the price,” said John.

Ruth was doubtful. Perhaps she should not have it. Journalists can't buy everything. But she followed John into the shop.

It was the kind of interior in which she felt at home, an interior full of spindle-legged tables, grandfather clocks, long-handled brass bed-warmers, three-cornered cupboards with Dresden shepherdesses behind their glass.

An old woman rose, like a monstrous bubble, from a chair in the farther recesses, advanced on them, laying down a copy of *Lovely Woman* on a gate-legged table as she drew nearer.

Brough bowed.

“Well?” the bubble asked.

“How much is that cameo brooch?” John inquired.

“Two guineas,” said the bubble, and looked out into the street, between Ruth and John. “Is it for the lady? Just the thing for fancy dress. Very tie-sty.”

Ruth and John confronted each other, one thought between their crazy heads, and John said :

“After three months.”

“Reconsider,” said Ruth.

Then, in duet, they said, catching Cromarty's voice very well indeed :

“And then probably three.”

The old woman, uncertain whether they were insolent or mad, lifted a feather duster and waved it at them.

“Let me lend you——” began Brough.

But Ruth fled, and he could but follow.

They proceeded, smiling like cherubs of Fragonard, turned a corner and saw space before them at the end of an alley, and sparrows chirped on the broad pavements out there, and pigeons showed, wagging in the gutter. One would not have been astonished to see Pickwick walk past, or Mr Micawber jauntily twirling his cane and conjecturing which way to turn.

Here, when they had almost run the gauntlet, an old window jutting out into the street, with bottle-glass panes, and rounded like a ship's stern, caught them.

On the side which they were approaching, looking through the bottom panes upon them, was something of purple, black and yellow—a laughing arrangement of colour that gave them pause.

They elbowed each other into the shop, and astonished the little girl who sat there plaiting her pig-tail, which she had drawn over her shoulder, by saying, like a glee :

“Is that Toby jug two guineas ? ”

"I'll ask father," said the little girl, passed to a door and called.

Ruth was brought, laughing, out of her usual gravity of exterior to comment :

"I had pigtails like that when I was a little girl."

"Father! How much is the Toby jug in the window?" the little girl called.

They held their breath—Ruth, John and she.

"Two guineas!" came from beyond.

"We can't leave it here," said Brough. "You have it."

He held forth his guinea to Ruth, one piece of gold and one of silver.

"You have it," said she.

He shook his head. Then—

"We must not leave it," he said. "The ownership can be decided later."

He put down his guinea. Ruth put down hers, and they passed out into the street again, John carrying the Toby jug, leaving the little girl to marvel that people could walk into a shop and expend a sovereign and a shilling, two half-sovereigns and a shilling and walk off with a jug in the shape of an old laughing man in cocked hat and funny clothes—and all that in the space of two minutes, with never an attempt to beat down the price.

But destiny meant Mapleton Wild to come into this chapter.

Cutting up from Fleet Street, up Hind Court, through Nevill's Court, along Breems Buildings, through Old Square, across New Square, he came, radiating *bonhomie*, but with tragic and anxious heart, for, in this radiant summer, he had to turn from lyrics on the hedges and go forth to write articles, not, he flattered himself, or admitted to himself, without some literary merit, on "How to Keep Cool These Days." The only thing on which he could congratulate himself was that less famous journalists, those poor devils who had not an immediate market, would be now writing on "Christmas Toys," and "The Origin of Santa Claus," and kindred themes.

Up Lincoln's Inn he came, profusely perspiring.

A black-banded, white Panama hat was upon his head. He was waistcoatless. The monocle, for the time being, was merely ornamental, on his shirt front. It was a black-rimmed one to match the black band of the Panama and the black tie. It hung ornamental on his shirt front, because his humidity was such as to moisten it just sufficiently to make the street look hazy through it, and, also, to cause it to spurt forth from his eye at the slightest frown. Between Fetter Lane and Chancery Lane

it had leapt forth thus seven times ; and when at last Wild gave up all hope of keeping it in place he evolved the nucleus of a topical article on "Midsummer Calm," the core of which article was to treat of the conservation of energy by ignoring the small irritants.

But he did not pause to make any note in his notebook. He was in haste.

He whirled round a corner at the north of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

At the same moment Ruth and John were turning the corner coming southward.

Mapleton Wild loomed upon them, imperilling the Toby jug, and leapt off the pavement, apologising, even before he recognised them, apologising verbally and expressively, with a great sweep of Panama hat and a bow such as one associates with those Spaniards who sailed to Panama in the days of Ferdinand and Isabella.

"Oh ! It's you ! Oh ! And you !" Mapleton Wild looked from Brough to Ruth. He looked back at Brough—at the Toby jug in Brough's hand.

"You have bought that !" His voice went up, with horror, from the "you" to the "that." "I saw it this morning, but I had only ten shillings in

my pocket and could beat them down no further than a guinea."

Ruth peeped up at Mapleton Wild. His pain was pitiable. She had thought at first when he cried out, "You have bought that!" that he was going to say it was valueless—from some critical point of view or another. But his face showed anguish, showed he wanted the Toby jug even before he told the tragedy of his lack of money in the morning.

"You were just on your way to buy it now?" Ruth suggested.

"Even so," said Wild. "Still!" He had the look of one practising fortitude. "There we are. Glorious weather, is it not?"

Ruth and John looked at each other like conferring owls.

"How very strange," said Ruth.

"We thought you would like it," said John.

"I would like it? I do; of course I do. I have never seen such a perfect example——"

"We bought it," began Ruth.

"For you," Brough hastily shouted, and held it forth.

"For me?"

"For you," they said in concert.

“From us both,” said Brough. “We shared the price.”

“A very, very pleasing tribute,” said Wild, and his eyes moistened. “A very, very pleasing tribute. This”—he held it forth, and admired—“means more to me than the paltry five guineas I received for the article.”

He had received only three guineas for his article on Toby jugs—but that is neither here nor there.

And in the cashier’s private desk, that night, reposed two fresh slips of paper. Upon the one was written :

“IOU five shillings.—RUTH WINTER.”

Upon the other :

“IOU two-and-six.—JOHN BROUGH. Till Friday night.”

CHAPTER XIV : FLEET STREET AFIELD

It was the custom, every summer, for the W. D. & H. staff to make holiday in some country place near London, and in winter to seek the felicities of a dance at one of the London hotels. The spirit of democracy was abroad on these festive occasions. Class distinction was ignored. Editors and foremen compositors exchanged cigars. The editors recalled, for the benefit of the "comps," and narrated, with gusto, glaring and humorous typographical errors in the press. The foremen compositors told amazing anecdotes about incomprehensible calligraphy, for the benefit of the editorial staff.

Sub-editors, at the summer gatherings, kicked a football about with the linotype and monotype operators, and at the winter one funk'd the dances and foregathered at the buffet to talk shop, frustrating Terpsichore. The back-page editress unbent to the despatch girls.

At the winter entertainment it was expected of Blandley to sing "Tom Bowling," profusely perspiring and trembling, a tragic figure that gave

shudders to every man present, as to gentlemen lynching a horse-thief in Mexico come shudders when the horse-thief falls on his knees and prays to them instead of saying : “ Well, so long, boys ; give me a good drop.”

One of the machine-room men would suddenly appear, pushing a little throne to the centre of the hired hall, mount upon it, and sing, “ And the villain still pursued her,” accompanying the vamps between stanzas with a double shuffle.

The editor of *The Daily One* would be convulsed with merriment over that performance. Ettie Wilson would sit with starting eyeballs, in titillating horror lest the awful man intended to sing every stanza. And the machineman did. The artists would sit, during the progress of that ditty of suspense, with loose mouths, eyes twinkling behind their pince-nez, now and then looking at their fingernails, or studying their boots—then joining in the applause with demoniacal glee. Some tender-hearted one would say “ Hush ! ” having noticed the pained expression on the face of a wizened little girl, the melodious machinist’s *fiancée*, who, out of her love for him, perceived that his success was somewhat unconsciously attained.

The picnic was better for Blandley ; for there,

when Ettie Wilson snubbed him, Blandley could cool his head in fresh air, instead of depart to the buffet. The "At Homes" and "dances" were purgatory to him. He would ask a dance and be refused. He would retire to the buffet. Then some wag would sit down near him and remark to someone else, just loud enough for Blandley to hear, that he wondered at Miss Wilson remaining single. "Of course," he would end, "what a girl like that needs, wants, is a masterful man, one who can show determination." Blandley would have another liqueur and march forth to demand a dance instead of crave it, and, a little later, return in misery—to the surreptitious delight of the subtle "joshers."

This chapter is to tell of the picnic.

It was, in a word, the kind of picnic that the editor of *Quidnuncs*, had anyone brought him an account of it, would, and rightly, have called "Bœotian."

Blandley, sent about his business by Ettie Wilson, adopted a nonchalant manner, and, stepping across a field in the direction of promising tiled roofs and a swinging sign seen between trees, carolled :

"'Summer is a-comen in.

Loud sing Cuckoo-cuckoo-oo-oo-oo !'"

Sanctley, who had given orders to the diminished

staff of reporters to keep alert for murders, suicides, rumours of wars, reports of possible strikes that might bring starvation to England, and all other forms of news, had run out for an hour to see the "fun." He remarked to Brough :

"Blandley is like a stotting ball. Do ye know what a stotting ball is ? "

Blandley, dancing up to him, cried :

"Me ! What am I like ? What is a stotting ball ? "

"A rebounding ball," said Sanctley.

Mr Fribble's voice was heard :

"I never see wasps without I recall Devon—dear old Devon. I used to visit often there when I was at Sandhurst—visit poor Lord Cider—killed in the hunting-field you may remember—a daring horse-man. I remember him saying to me, laying his hand with all the semblance of affection on my shoulder : ' My boy, I can handle horses—I fear no leap—but wasps ! ! ' "

Sanctley, Blandley, Brough, strolled into the quaint, to modern eyes, "Five Bells Inn," strolled into the garden.

"Ah, this is a homely spot," said Sanctley. "Sweet-williams, peonies, pansies, nasturtiums ! I see they have some bees."

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He strolled over toward the hives, then turned and said sadly :

“ Do ye ken what a bee-skep is ? ”

“ Bee-skep ? Bee-skep ? ” said Blandley.

“ Bee-skep ? No,” said Brough.

“ Bee-hive,” said Sanctley, with a sad smile. “ It’s a wonder you fellows didn’t know that. It’s in your line—local colour for your Scottish stories. I don’t know what journalism is coming to now. It beats me to see on a placard of a daily newspaper, ‘ Our New Serial Begins to-day.’ ”

“ Yes—it’s all fiction nowadays—even the news,” suggested Brough.

Others wandered after them into the garden, like sheep into a cosy fold. Many tables were already being covered (by hurrying men in old dress-suits) with white cloths, teapots, cut bread, cakes.

“ Mr Brough ! Mr Brough ! ”

Brough turned round.

Ettie Wilson was calling him.

“ Do come,” she said, “ like a good man, and keep order at our table.”

The coughing of a motor bicycle sounded beyond the old red-brick wall as Brough sat down with the bevy of beauty of which Ettie had made herself the chief.

He was the only man at their table, for women predominated at the picnic, even as at the winter levities. The coughing of the bicycle stopped, and, gloriously framed in the entrance to the garden, Mapleton Wild appeared, very huge, in a motor-rig of drab over-pants and drab jacket. "Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth" exuded from him and were more obvious than the odour of petrol.

He sat down on a tree stump and held up his elephantine legs. The pot-boy laid hold of the overalls and retreated from him, tugging, and walking backwards, drawing off the overall pants.

Out of the hostelry came, at this moment, another person, Ruth Winter, the incessant washer, whose first thought on approaching the hostelry had been ablution. There she was, in spreading white skirts, pressing her brown hands together as if feeling, and relishing, their freshness. The machinist's *fiancée*, seeing her, gave a little "Oh" of delight, nudged the machinist and said: "Look at her."

Ettie Wilson, who had been trilling her laughter into summer air with the rest, making merry over Wild's whimsical appearance, he sitting on the stump, being peeled by the pot-boy, saw Ruth and was aware that she was not posing. Ruth had but then

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emerged to the sound of laughter and was looking for the cause of it. She was unaware that she now "took the stage," and that, at her coming, Wild's "turn" was over.

Ettie was aware, however. So Ettie sat a little more erect, thrust her chin out a little, looked down her nose toward Ruth.

But there was really more behind this action of Ettie's than the ordinary, everyday *brusquerie*, procacity, or displacency which, she had observed, were coming to be "the thing" among a section of society that she kept a watch upon, for "the latest" in smart conduct.

Some time ago Miss Ettie Wilson had submitted an article on "How to Entertain" to *Lovely Woman*. The editress had called it "just the thing."

So far so good.

But Editress Ruth had removed the statement, "By a Lady of Quality," from beneath the title and had substituted, "By a Celebrated Head Waiter."

She had done so simply as an editress thinking of her paper. So many "ladies of quality" had written for her paper, from their west-end mansions, on all manner of themes, themes varying from the "Sins of the Smart Set" to the "Injustice of Being a

Poor Wife," that she thought she would be wise to give her readers a change.

Ettie didn't like it. She preferred her own lie to the editorial one.

Mapleton Wild, thus treated by an editor, would probably have sent copies of the paper to all his friends, with a note in the margin: "Isn't this splendid? M. W." But Ettie Wilson felt—and Ettie Wilson is her own mistress—that Ruth Winter, editress of *Lovely Woman*, had to be looked at down her nose. But not even Ettie Wilson thought that Ruth had altered the original line to insult her. She looked upon it as merely another instance of editorial incompetence. But how could Ettie Wilson show that article to anybody as hers! Ugh!

"Ah, Miss Winter, here is a table for us!" Wild hailed Ruth after a survey of the garden.

It was a small circular table to which he beckoned her, at which he stood, in grand manner (which he meant as compliment, token of esteem), awaiting her.

As she tripped to the table her muslin dress fanned out and she seemed to Wild reminiscent of, he thought, a picture he had seen, but by whom—Shannon?—Lavery?—no—he could not remember. Brough looked at her and forgot all about his white lady of porcelain.

Ettie had just decided to turn her head slowly away as if she had seen enough of Ruth. Then Ruth stubbed her toe on a serpentine hidden tree root. Ettie's head was just turning on top of the long neck that was almost like the neck of the fashion-plate ladies on the sixth page of *The Daily One*. She saw the stubbing and smiled sweetly, then looked away, with air of dismissing something only casually interesting.

"I should like to escape from Fleet Street and its associations," she said to Brough.

"I beg your pardon," said Brough, recalled from some Hesperides.

She frowned at him. Then she smiled at him.

"I should like to escape from Fleet Street, I said. I have written a novel. I think it will be a success."

"Do novelists make as much as journalists?" he asked, still absent of mien.

"Oh!" she cried. "I hope my book will be sold in chemists' shops. The height of a novelist's ambition should be to be sold in chemists' shops."

"That's witty," said Brough.

Wild, at the little table just beyond, asked leave of Ruth to take a note of an idea. What he wrote was but an epigram to work around for next week's *Between Two Stools* page article. It was: "Humour

is of God and wit of the devil.” Then he remembered his little Pan upon his desk at home, and added: “Both are enjoyable.” Putting his notebook away again he presented a plate of obfuscated *éclair*s to Ruth and begged of her to do what she could to change the colour scheme of the plate by a process of subtraction; for, as Americans say, it was “up to Wild” to say something of the kind.

“Have you found a title for your novel?” asked Brough. “I believe some novelists have the title before they start, others——”

“‘The Pursuit of the Virgin,’” said Ettie. “The *motif* is to show quietists and dreamers as last year’s issues—*don’t you know?*”

“No,” said Brough.

“Mad, quite mad,” thought Ettie, “or else he moves in no society worth mentioning.”

“I’d like to get ’ome before nine any’ow,” the machinist’s *fiancée*, already mentioned, was saying, upon the other side. “Mother is out to-day and I want to get ’ome to see to Lizzy getting her supper—*see?*”

“I intend to show woman,” said Ettie, raising her voice, “as bringing out of man all the fire and go—making him at last alive and impassioned—*don’t you know?*”

“Men are not practical,” said a squat little woman who sat near Ettie, chipping in abruptly, with flashing eyes.

Brough thought of the little cargo boats tramping the great oceans, but said nothing. Then, finding that the little squat woman was looking at him, he opened his eyes.

“Oh, you can’t stare me out !” she screamed.

A sigh went round the garden. The whole staff wondered who on earth had invited this annoyance to the picnic, or if she had come uninvited.

“Do you mean,” came Wild’s voice, as he turned, and, with an arm on the back of his chair, looked at Ettie, “do you mean alive and impassioned to do something for the world ?”

“Oh dear, no ! Nothing so serious,” said Ettie, looking radiant. “For *her*.”

“I see,” said Wild, and turned back to Ruth. “I beg your pardon—you want some hot water.” Ruth sat looking thoughtfully at her plate. Ettie shot a glance at her and smiled at her demure face.

“Take care ! There’s a wasp in the shuggar !” came Cromarty’s voice from somewhere.

“When I was at Cambridge I used to spend vacation with my friend, Lord Devon,” another voice rose up.

The scattered reporters cleared their throats.

Ruth glanced at John Brough. Her eyes were big and thoughtful as she saw Brough attending eagerly to Ettie Wilson. How was Ruth to know that he was attending to Ettie thus singly, thus eagerly, mainly to evade the bitter-visaged, squat, elderly lady with the high cheekbones and low Pompadoured forehead, thinking that if he showed himself clearly attending on some other lady her knowledge of breeding might make her cease to worry him.

He had to hasten away with Ettie more eagerly still, for the squat lady now hammered on the table with her fist and cried out :

“ Do you hear me, sir ! Where are your manners ? You can’t stare me out ! Men are not practical.”

I don’t believe Brough was.

How was Ruth to know that it was to escape from that uninvited guest that Ettie’s tableful became so soon satisfied, and that all rose and departed ? Ruth only saw Brough and Ettie wandering over to a parrot perch where a parrot of yellows and purples and blues craned his neck at visitors, raised his crest, bent forward, then unexpectedly seemed to topple over, but always recovered, like a trapeze trick gymnast, and hung by one foot, screaming.

Ruth, remembering that private worries must not darken those around us, turned back to Wild—and behold ! he was sitting, elbow on table, jaw laid on palm, looking sidewise at Brough and Ettie with such an expression of friendly regret, nay, almost anguish, in his eyes, that Ruth very nearly snuffled. He confirmed her in her misery.

CHAPTER XV: THE PALLOR OF SUMMER

RUTH considered London from the front seat of the omnibus, her cheeks still tingling with country air, her ears still hearing the songs of birds.

She saw the ceaseless stream of homing clerks. It seemed to her that they looked as if London had withered them. Knowing the wages of clerks she wondered how those who wore gold-rimmed spectacles saved the money to buy them.

Homing shopgirls, slatternly and pallid, their cheap clothes fashionably cut from fashion papers given away weekly with *Lovely Woman* and rival sheets, seemed to her a delusion and a snare; for she could still hear the rattling of slow waggons on the winding, hedge-scented roads of Kent; could still see the shadows of beeches lengthen down eastward slopes of green; and, by shutting her eyes, could still see the blue weald outspread and shimmering below her.

The clerks would be happier, she thought, at the plough-shafts; the girls milking cows. But she knew just enough of "The Condition of England"

to know that, if they wanted to plough or milk, these lads and lassies had better seek a colony. She was pitying these young people far more than they pitied themselves, I think. And soon, as she looked at them more closely, she began to suspect that here was their joy. The majority were but poor members of that great class of persons who are miserable when crossing even the Atlantic in a ship, and require a hotel. Most of these shopgirls were but penurious members of the Smart Set. She marked the tragic, to her, rakishness of their hats. She saw their eyes turn enviously and admiringly to gaze upon some luckier member of their great guild who came forth of a perfumer's, carrying a poodle and a sheaf of what Ruth recognised as political pamphlets, and entered a plush-lined landau. Pale with heat the shopgirls beheld and noted the carriage of their sister's head ; they memorised her hat. They, too, were of London. They, too, were of the Great Swirl. Her tea might be sipped in Regent Street. But their poses, at the marble tables of the tea-shops, with their feet upon linoleum or tiles, would be the same as hers when she sat over a ravishing teacloth with her feet in soft carpet. They had never felt, with Emerson, in his *Self-Reliance*, " Why all this deference to Alfred, and Scandberg, and Gustavus ? "

It was not exactly self-reliance that they lacked. Nor, if they were given Whitman to look over by someone desirous to aid them, would they be likely to discover: "I have taken off my hat to nothing known or unknown"; or, discovering it, it would show them not the dormant dignity in themselves, only nurture, instead, that flaunting side of them that they could nurture more surely by looking upon the ladies of the last comic opera. Or perhaps they would stumble upon one of the merely "natural" parts of Whitman and giggle over that higher animal's chantings.

There are persons who must be in the whirlpools. There are persons who rejoice, like Whitman, to feel the thighs of the persons on either side of them in the tramcar, but are bored to death, unlike Whitman, by the brown bird singing; are terrorised by the voice of the sea that Whitman heard whispering, before dawn, the one inevitable word. They crave for a string band between them and God. Not only the merry, but the terror-stricken, ask for a two-step. The corner of even the cheapest café, hum of its talk, rattle of its dominoes, are part of necessity to them. But, if you preach self-reliance to those devoid of courtesy, actually you preach not Self-Reliance but Insolence.

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To be shot suddenly into London, from the Weald of Kent, upon a summer afternoon, is a trying ordeal for such sensitive folk as Ruth. Her eyes were moist as she joggled home on the lumbering horse omnibus.

But were these tears wholly for humanity on paving-stones ?

She saw Green Park with the grass almost obliterated by prone people lying in all attitudes of poverty and lassitude, lying so thickly that they made the place look like a field of the dead through which a few nursemaids conducted children, as if to let them imagine it was a battlefield, instead of reading them the "bluggy" bits out of "Paton of the New Hebrides," or "Chalmers of New Guinea." Grey grass under grey trees whose leaves and blossoms gave forth a scent of petrol caused Ruth to ask : "Why ? What for ?"

Many west-end ladies who talk of "eugenics" and call themselves "sociologists" have never known the sinking of heart that Ruth felt here this summer afternoon. It is not necessary to a knowledge that something is wrong with London to go to Lady Newfad's At Home and sip her tea and be looked upon through her lorgnette and hearken to the exact accent of pronunciation of the words

“ sociology ” and “ eugenics ” to know that London lacks oxygen.

Ruth recalled a recent letter from a reader down Tidal Basin way :

“ I do wish you could do something for me. I been a constant reader of your piper for sis mons. I have twelve of a family the last was a seven mons child and not complete and I shoud like to have it buried in a parish cofin.”

“ Why? What for? ” said Ruth, and remembered, “ And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart.”

“ I beg your pardon, miss ? ” said the driver.

“ I didn’t say anything,” said Ruth sweetly.

“ Oh, I beg your pardon,” said the driver.

The late afternoon made a glamour in Edgware Road. The summer heat was ebbing out of the pavements there. The street was in shadow ; but the top-flat windows on the east side were all reflecting the sun.

Down Edgware Road, as through a funnel, a cool draught of wind blew, atoning for the stuffiness of the city, the stuffiness of many breaths and dust of the streets, smell of horses and horse-dung, of petrol and people. London becomes, on days such as this,

now ending, like a room facing the sun, full of pale mortals who can't get out.

Ruth glanced at her watch, drawing nearer home.

Just a little over an hour ago she had been in the country, where thrushes were beginning to seek the tops of trees preparatory to their last song of the day. The swift transition from their roulades to cries of newspaper-boys had created an air of unreality. She could not believe that she was really here; could not believe that she had really been there—despite the din now in her ears, despite the retinal pictures of Kent still with her.

The driver coughed violently and turned to the front-seat passenger.

"Summer cold, miss," he explained. "It's a strange thing to be a-coughing in midsummer; but it's them streets. It's like a-sitting in a chimbley. My missus has a cup of 'ot caw-fee for me every night, summer and winter alike."

"Some people never think what a really ticklish job yours is," said Ruth.

She spoke sympathetically, but she was selfishly sorry, just a trifle, that he had spoken. If an actor in a play, which you looked on at, were suddenly to lean down at the wings and speak to you, you would be jarred.

“As you say,” the omnibus-driver replied gratefully.

“It is not only the crossings and the steering through the blocks,” said Ruth, seeing the driver far off, and, to prevent shouting to him, reminding herself that he was really close by.

He looked round more keenly now, to see this Miss Wisdom on the “upper-deck” left front seat.

“That’s the pictureskew side only,” he said, and turned round energetically to the right side, or, as he would say, the off-side, to cough forcibly behind his hand, and spit down under it, all with the air of letting a real lidy see that he knew his manners. Then he turned back and delivered a banal apologia on caw-fee till she alighted. It is principally in the pages of *Punch* that London’s drivers say things at all approaching brilliance. Ruth gave him a sweet good-evening when she alighted at the corner of Blomfield Avenue, and walked the last short lap homeward.

A journalist may go a-picnicking. A journalist may go a-dancing. But the paper must not suffer. Proofs left unread by day must be read at night. So, on her return, Ruth (after the inevitable bath) sat in a great cane chair preparing next week’s issue, writing replies to girls who had been “walking out for six months with a young man and he has not

once kissed me. Would you advice me to break it off or is it olrite ? ”

Girls who wanted to be stewardesses, girls who wanted to know the language of flowers, girls who wanted to learn stenography, girls who wanted to know what young men meant by posting letters to them “ with the stamps on upside down ”—she read letters from all these and answered them. Do not imagine that she “ answered ” always in the sense of being explanatory. A wise parson once explained to a lady who had prayed to God for twins and received no reply : “ Ah, madam, God sometimes says ‘ No.’ ” Sometimes Ruth “ replied ” not as they expected. In reply to some questions she wrote long letters advising her correspondent not to be foolish. Not all her replies were printed in the “ Letter-Box ” page of *Lovely Woman*. Many went direct. Over some Ruth even put up, before she well knew what she was about, a little prayer—to what God I can’t tell, for she never attended church or chapel, and she appreciated the jest about that journalist who, reporting a Salvation Army meeting, was asked, “ Are you saved ? ” and, flabbergasted, stammered, “ I—I’m a journalist,” and received the hushed, “ Oh, I beg your pardon.”

The light faded as she worked ; so she rose and

passed through the greenhouse, the tiles of which struck cold because the gardener had recently drenched the place with water. Drops still fell from the fuchsias. The metal-like leaves of the palms still glistened. A blow-fly, overtaken by the deluge, still struggled up the glass, disconsolate.

Ruth went down into the garden, carrying a cushion under one arm, and laden further with safety inkpot, pen, proofs, correspondence, and sat on the cushion on the edge of the lawn. But she did little more advising of factory girls who, over their looms in Lancashire, worked more easily, having asked her advice, and awaiting it.

A terrible letter that began : " Dear Lady, what have I to do ? " and told of ulcers in the stomach, clothes in the pawn-shop, a blood-poisoned husband, a hump-backed baby, an eldest daughter run off with a soldier, and a baby on the way, gave her pause.

Day was done.

The pen in her hand was dipped but once in the safety inkpot after her migration to the lawn. She wrote no words of gentle admonition or wise advice.

She sat staring at the night gathering between the ivy leaves in the far corner of the garden.

Really she was not looking at the ivy. What she beheld was Mr Brough and Ettie Wilson in the

garden of the Five Bells. Then she saw Ettie sitting on a table in the offices, holding a knee with lithe fingers and making a sweep of captivating shimmering satin from upheld left knee to tip of twiddling right foot in flattering parody of Sarah Bernhardt in one of that actress's most characteristic poses.

Ruth shook her head at the ivy and said :

“ She's not the woman for him.”

She saw Ettie, again, walking round the garden of the Five Bells with John Brough. Oh, tragic garden, with all its happy people, and voices vulgar, voices cultured ! It was a very beautiful little garden, but she was sure that Ettie Wilson was not the woman for John Brough—the man who bought that Toby jug and gave it to Wild. Ettie would prevent him if he meditated such deeds. But John Brough's wife should never try to dissuade him if he wanted to do such things.

They had been to the same school in Hastings. Ruth remembered the early Ettie, and she saw the developing Ettie. She remembered Ettie as one always with an arm round the waist of the moment's popular favourite. She remembered Ettie as always in the forefront of majorities.

There was one incident from the private theatricals, for example, that came to her now : Ettie's affection

of two days for one of the girls who could wash the rouge off her face easily, after a performance—a two-day affection only, for on the evening of the second day the girl had explained, “You should put cold cream on your face first,” and Ettie went off to embrace another girl from whom she wanted something else.

She remembered how Ettie snubbed one girl mercilessly, till the mother of that girl came to visit the school one day, in a motor car, which awaited her at the door—a great, gaping car showing a cavity of ermine and bouquets.

“Why! She would marry a man to exploit him,” thought Ruth.

She remembered Ettie in the dormitory, sitting up in her much-beribboned nightdress, to tell stories that required much winking and ogling and giggling and tittering. It was Ettie who had dubbed Ruth “Puritan Ruth”—and been furious because Ruth did not get angry. It had never occurred to Ruth to call Ettie “Eroto-maniac Ettie.”

“No,” said Ruth, “she is not the woman for him. She would not help him.”

Between her and the ivy she again saw John Brough sitting with Ettie at that table in the Five Bells garden.

I suspect that that picture had some share in making her so melancholy when she returned to London to-day, that picture as much as her pity for humanity in crowds. I don't say that she knew then that she was worrying about Brough. But if that picture had not been with her she might have been less saddened by the crowds. It is true that the average units in it walked along as if going home were a boring habit, but some went joyfully. She might have seen more of the leaven and less of the lump if she had not had her own hardly acknowledged regret in her heart.

She recalled Wild's doubtful gaze upon Ettie and Brough, his friendship for Brough showing then, clearly, in his hazel eyes ; his doubt showing on his puckered mouth, and in the grim way he held his chin, puckering his mouth. It was clear to Ruth that Mapleton Wild thought that Ettie had thrown her charm over the acting editor of *Between Two Stools*, and equally clear that he thought that charm meretricious.

"Oh, what a pity it would be," thought Ettie. "I don't criticise Ettie Wilson—but she's not for Brough. She would turn him into a money-making machine. He would be in the offices day and night, sub-editing and writing, and she would be at all the

receptions sailing about as ‘the fascinating Mrs John Brough-Brough,’ or something like that—‘the beautiful Mrs Wilson-Brough’—and she is beautiful too—very queenly—her corsets are expensive.”

The proofs upon Ruth’s knee slipped on to the grass and recalled her wandering mind. She found that it was too dark to read the proofs, found also that she was cramped and chilled. The last orange light had wholly gone from the chinks between the house-backs opposite. Lit rear windows of the adjoining houses cast out their parallelograms of radiance on dewy lawns.

She rose, stiffly, cold, gathered her papers and passed indoors, with the cushion under her arm.

But oh—would that she were not a woman! If she were a man friend of Brough’s she would tell him not to make an ass of himself.

CHAPTER XVI: HOW THE PIGEONS TOOK FLIGHT

WHILE Ruth, gathering rheumatism in her garden, was vexing her disinterested soul, Brough was in a motor car with Ettie Wilson, spinning into London so quickly that the midges and flies peppered his face, almost as stinging as hail in their impact, and were caught in Ettie's green veil as fish in a net.

Other motor cars were dotted before and behind.

In the one directly behind, sitting beside the chauffeur, ready to tip him, if necessary, to keep the one ahead in sight, sat Blandley, biting his lips and running his hand ever and again over his face, or sucking on an extinguished pipe.

"Shall I slow down for you to light up?" asked the beaming chauffeur.

"Drive on!" snapped Blandley, and lacking the genius of Wild, saw not in this affair any suggestion for his work.

Had Wild been fiction-monger instead of (as he announced himself in all tax papers and the like that held a space for "profession") *homme de lettres*, he

would have peopled these cars with detectives, anarchists, Russian spies, English diplomatic service gentlemen—and would have had a magnificent time, hooting back to London, aiming (when no one was looking) at the motor car ahead, with his pipe-bowl in hand, pistol-wise, instead of gripping his teeth upon the stem—and the pipe unlit !

Blandley had no such imaginative and childish capacity. He looked ahead, madly, at the tonneau of the car that held Brough and Ettie and the advertising manager's secretary, at the hat that bobbed and waved and fluttered over it.

The cars came to the region of brick-fields and nurseries. Then the road on which they travelled altered its appearance. No longer it seemed a high-road of England, that passed through many villages ; it seemed rather a main artery of London, connecting suburb to suburb. Very soon the appearance of these suburbs changed. There were no longer clusters of houses, and boards announcing " These Fine Commodious Residential, etc., etc., etc.," coming into view at intervals and falling behind. Houses were on both sides, behind, before. The cars ran on and on, hooting ; and before long they were being held up, or ordered to pass on, by the regulating policemen of London crossings.

The picnickers were back in "The Street"; the picnic was an affair of the past, one with the forgotten junketings of Babylon and Tyre.

A surprise awaited them.

Crowds were hastening toward the W. D. & H. offices. The cars had to crawl through, hooting ceaselessly. They could not come to the front door, had to turn aside with much hooting and use the back entrance, run into the great well or yard to rear and line up beside the ramshackle but swift motor cars kept for despatching the W. D. & H. papers to the four quarters.

Down the main street, as they turned into this sideway, they could see policemen thrusting back the crowd; and over the crowd soared a great fire-escape at the ready.

The cars passed under an archway into the yard, hooting; startled people scuttled and contorted on to the pavements, getting out of danger in ungainly poses.

So far the returning picnickers had seen no smoke. But as the first cars of the cortège crawled into the yard and slid to a standstill beside the placarded delivery cars (as tinselly yachts go sliding into a dock beside the black and romantic tramp boats) the returned picnickers saw smoke coil out of the

upper windows, hang there, then rise in a succession of coils, like bubbles or wobbly balloons. It came out blue and brown. It wreathed and curled and made these great uncertain bulbs. It rose and changed colour in the higher regions where the sunlight that had left the cañons of the streets lingered in the air above.

The light that Ruth, at Maida Vale, was watching as it faded, turned the brown smoke into purple and blue and gold and red. But the colour scheme was observed only by Brough and one or two mad artists who recalled it afterwards—to the chuckling consternation of Cromarty.

I mention Cromarty. Cromarty, of course, was there, the ubiquitous Cromarty, who had rushed off to show himself to the picnic party, moved by the spirit that caused Penn to take one whiff of tobacco—showing himself kin with all creation. He had last been seen and heard in the garden of the Five Bells. No one had observed him depart. Yet here he was, now, at the front, as cool as the cucumber of the proverb. All his shouting and gesticulations were but vitality. Also, I think a bit of him enjoyed this fire. If it was, it was. And it comes to be second nature with good editors to relish holocausts and suicides, and raise horrified hands over

incendiarism and resent "incentives to suicide"—you remember the Goldsmith incident.

Brough had scarcely handed out Miss Wilson and the advertising manager's secretary, when the pursuing motor arrived, slid level, stopped, and Blandley alighted.

Those of the staff who had to return to the offices (by motor or train) to make up, in a spurt of work, for the spurt of frivolity, began to gather in the court.

Blandley, after a quick excited talk with Cromarty, dashed up the rearward stair.

Miss Wilson's voice broke out: "Is the top floor——"

"Oh, your room is just getting it," said Cromarty, in an aside that seemed to be charged with childish or demoniac hilarity.

"My novel!" cried Miss Wilson.

Blandley reappeared, laden, from his outstretched hands, fingers locked, to under his out-thrust chin, with manuscripts piled on manuscripts.

"Mr Blandley—I have a manuscript in my room—and no copy of it," cried Ettie.

"My God!" Brough ejaculated, rushed up the stairs, leaving Blandley to stare uncertainly at Ettie and consider whether by ignoring her or by

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doing this service for her that she asked he would draw nearer to conquest.

“Take care of yourself, Brough!” Cromarty shouted; but Brough had disappeared in the doorway.

Other cars arrived. Other parties returned from railway stations. Other voices joined in the babel.

A brass-helmeted fireman came clamping from the doorway where Brough had disappeared and spoke to Cromarty. A knot clustered round trying to overhear their conversation. The brass-helmeted man departed with clattering tread.

Cromarty gave orders to a group of sub-editors and they ran for the stairs and disappeared, crowding in at the doorway like mixed nuts into a grinder.

Suddenly everybody looked up, startled. At the top of the building the smoke came in fresh volume. Those who stood farther back, and Cromarty, who was standing on the driver's seat of one of the delivery cars, saw a skylight in the roof go up. A great flapping sounded overhead, excited clatter of pigeons' wings. All saw the pigeons go up, saw that twinkling aerial dash for freedom of pigeon after pigeon. The birds swerved over the smoke; they went up and up into the sky till they reached the lingering light that the smoke-wreaths had lost now.

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High over London a hundred pairs of wings twinkled.

“ These brave firemen think of even the poor dumb creatures,” said a capable reporter, forgetting that pigeons coo and say “ Oh.”

“ My novel ! ” cried Ettie.

Blandley came pattering into the court again. He must have gone upstairs the second time unnoticed. He carried another great stack of manuscripts.

Cromarty, on his high perch, was the only one who could see the roof fairly. He had climbed to the top of the car when the pigeons rose ; and now he returned with agility to the driver’s seat, stepped down, looking worried at last, instead of hilarious. He was no longer content to give orders. He ran smartly to the stairs and disappeared.

Those in the court awaited the return of their general. They did not know why they fell silent. They hushed in a kind of dread, or expectancy. They remained thus till a brass helmet glittered at the door and Brough appeared, with a fireman on one side, a stolid sub-editor on the other and Cromarty behind. Brough hung limp between his bearers.

Then it dawned on them that it was Brough who had opened the skylight and given a way of escape

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to the pigeons. When they saw him put his feet down and walk, after a fashion, they broke into cheers and cries of "Bravo!"

"What did he do?" asked the fireman who supported him upon one side. "What's he saved?"

"Pigeons," said Cromarty. "Went up to the loft and opened the skylight."

The fireman was irate.

"Why didn't you tell us? We didn't know anything abaht pigeons. And why didn't he go out on the roof when he got up that far and go along the roof instead of coming dahn again through——"

"What a fool I was," Brough grumbled—but that he could speak was a huge relief to the onlookers, and they cheered again.

"I've 'phoned for a doctor to be at his flat," said a reporter, dashing into the throng and plucking Cromarty's sleeve. He had run off to a telephone when the first cheer broke out, and returned when the second rose, so that for a moment he thought the second one was offered to him, a token of admiration for his celerity.

"All right! I've 'phoned!" said another. These two flashed professional indignation at each other and then laughed.

Cromarty looked round for Blandley.

“Where’s Blandley? He should go with him.”

“Blandley has gone in again.”

“Well! Well! Somebody go with him in this car. That’s right, Brough. Up you go—left, right. There you are.”

Cromarty saw his secretary. His eye met hers.

“You go,” he said.

“I’ll go,” she proffered.

“I’ll go too,” said Ettie.

Miss Royston sat beside John. Ettie sat opposite. The chauffeur, with half cigarette stuck over his ear (as clerks stick pens on their ears, using them for pen-racks), said:

“I’ll see to ’im, sir. He’s all right.”

The people in the street gave the third cheer as the motor passed through. But a policeman had to clear a way for it, because their curiosity was greater than their humanity—I use the word in its fine sense, rather on the side of “divine” than of “brutish.” A journalist, however, could not complain, for, if the great public lacked the prying instinct, where would he be? They pestered the driver with questions and he kept chanting:

“Thank you! Thank you! Went up in the hatties and let the pigeons aht. Thank you!

Thank you ! Hie. Get aht of it there, you—thank you ! ”

Brough, on the rear seat, was sinking his singed head on Miss Royston's shoulder and saying : “ ‘ Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.’ Anyhow I let them out. No ! There were no hens in the hen-coop. When I was a boy in Hastings I kept pigeons.”

As his head fell upon Miss Royston's shoulder he spoke a name ; and Miss Royston looked at Ettie quickly, to see if Ettie had heard. Evidently she had not. Miss Royston would keep her thumb on it. But it made her heart jump—the way he spoke the name, although it was not hers.

“ The pursuit of the Virgin ! ” said Brough, with a chuckle. “ Ha ! Ha ! Mike—catch on here, Mike. It will support us both. Give me your hand, Mike. I want to see the blue and purple. I don't give a cent for the pursuit of—— Mike—catch on. Mike used to say——” But what Mike used to say had better be left unwritten. Its effect on Miss Royston was to make her feel older. Its effect on Miss Wilson was to make her consider that perhaps her book was more coy than daring.

CHAPTER XVII: A FRIENDLY LETTER

THE day after the day of the picnic this note arrived at Brough's flat, but remained unopened, with others :

“ MY DEAR BROUGH,—Strange that only the other day you should have come to see me, your spirit lyrical over its great bout with other existences—coming into touch with humanity—and that so soon I should have seen—and been in a position to study—the subject of your eulogy, or pæan, spoken to me here. For it was a pæan—though perhaps with an added lustre, I do not say meretricious, but momentary.

“ I write now, however, as your best friend.

“ Don't make an ass of yourself. She is not for you. She is really not suited for you and—one never knows—if you ‘ proposed ’ she might accept. If you were to marry her you would become sane. I recognise that she is witty, charming, frothy—vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, and this is also vanity. Yours sincerely,

“ MAPLETON WILD.”

CHAPTER XVIII : WINE AND WOMAN

WHEN aught had gone agee with Ettie and she desired a tonic to help her to relish, unruffled, her attractiveness, to help her to be conscious that she was alluring, she found it at one of those restaurants in which music is played, and played excellently at times, in which the waiters treat the guests with a mixture of manners, dictatorial and servile. For a restaurant in which the blend is advisory and courteous she had little use ; it seemed to her an emasculated kind of place. When chagrined, or out of love with herself, she hied her to a restaurant patronised by affluent men who had not worked for their money, but had it left to them, by ladies of fashion and demi-mondaines ; a restaurant visited occasionally by young colonials who had delivered themselves into the hands of a tailor Bond Street way, so as to be able to see London's dressed side ; a restaurant surreptitiously enjoyed by wives of men whose business called them away from home sometimes. In such restaurants Ettie recovered, by sending her " wireless " operator into his den not to

send off messages, but to receive them. She acknowledged no glances of admiration ; she bathed in them, but never splashed. It did her good, she felt, to be stared at not too violently by some fat luncher who bent over his plate, peeping under his brows between stares, supping soup, breaking rolls, morning-coated, Ascot-tied, drinking more than one wine. It refreshed her like a vibratory massage.

It did her good to sit erect and see some lady, fashionably attired, survey her with countenance as drowsy as poppies, as immobile as the face-makers of the third flats in Bond Street (whose business is paring corns, polishing nails, affixing masks) could make it. It pleased her to look once at such scrutinising dames, open her eyes a little wider, meeting the stare as if to oblige an oculist, or as if a smut of dust were in her eye and someone was looking for it—and then to turn her head away and cease to see the inquiring lady who sat corseted from arm-pits to knees, heavily furred, heavily painted, heavily ringed—dismissed, as if Ettie, in opening her eyes to the scrutiny, had suddenly become aware that the lady was perhaps no better than she should be, or had some weak spot in her attire. They who enter such places merely to eat something had better

go elsewhere. These are the salons of the smart vulgarians.

In such a place Ettie sat a few days after the picnic and the fire, looking especially great, alabasterish, poised—because she was angry and calculating. She was considering that Mapleton Wild had been rude to her, been rude while in full possession of his senses ; Brough had been rude in delirium—and so not rude at all. Brough, in possession of his senses, she considered, was never rude to her. She would dearly like to make Wild delirious, fire him into a state in which he might be heedless of decorum, fire him, if possible, into passion, to insult her and receive her snub. He would deserve it. She would let him see his limitations. If Wild had been sitting at her table in the garden of the Five Bells on the day of the picnic, if they had been *tête-à-tête* and he had adopted the contradictory manner, she would not have objected. She liked to have spars with men, just as she liked waiters to be half dominating, half servile. But for Wild to sit at that other table in the Five Bells, under that oak-tree, or whatever kind of silly tree it was, and become argumentative at long range, was an insult.

She sat there now, in this town restaurant, picking a *hors-d'œuvre* with a dainty silver fork and con-

sidering that the time would come when she would bring Wild to her feet ; and then a slight draught fanned her cheek, a flutter was in her heart ; she glanced up and saw the liveried door-opener, against a narrow, upright glimpse of street, looking in at the back of a man to whom he had just given entrance.

She looked at the new arrival. She would have seen him first, instead of the door-opener, had it not been that the light of the world without drew her eye to the liveried door-opener, he being framed in it. This new arrival entered as the great enter, or as sensitive persons, who may consider that for this or that reason they have to enter a place they abhor, do enter it at the hour of half-hearted action. His left hand was raised, finger-tips close, thumb as if feeling up for the forefinger ; and the lustrous cane, alleged to have been Barbey D'Aurevilly's, swung from that hand. He raised his head, this great arrival, and finding many persons scrutinising him from behind tables and napkins, affixed his monocle and looked round upon them as if he thought that they were the steaks beside the grill, and that he might select them, as guests may select steaks still in one or two places in London.

Ettie nearly fell in love (or passion) with him, nearly forgot her resolve to crush him.

Courage, Ettie ! This will be a stiff encounter, perhaps, before all is over.

He was so magnificent a figure then, and so clearly "went down" with the whole collection of Jews, Simians, demi-mondaines, perfectly respectable and all, that she considered it was no cheapening of herself to pluck from her sleeve a little cambric mist and half rise, which she did, holding her skirts with the left hand, waving the little piece of white with the long taper-fingered right ; and with a voice like mellow flute notes she hailed him :

"Mapleton Wild !"

She knew that before so great an audience he would confer such a gesture of homage as——

He did.

He caused her nearly to decide to let him off.

And really he was pleased to see her ; for he was somewhat bored, questing round in search of copy for an article on "Is London Gay ?"

At anyrate, as he came to her and bowed over her hand and then, wheeling round, held up his face to the waiter as if to ask if the under side of his chin had been cut while shaving, he succeeded in obtaining from the waiter, as now and again it is possible to obtain, a cessation of the dictatorial manner, and be granted in its stead a servility quite natural and

therefore irritating only on one count instead of two.

Mapleton Wild sat down, leant across to Ettie, laid his napkin across his knee and gently he whispered, as if making love to her : “ What a hell of a place ! ”

Then to the menu-card : “ I wonder if I should start scratch ”—he looked over the top at Ettie—“ or if I should let you have your handicap.”

“ *Hors-d'œuvre* ? ” the waiter grunted.

“ Not this *hors-d'œuvre* ! Give me two sardines and four olives ! ”

The waiter bowed and departed ; and, when he returned, a man who was not a waiter—he wore a frock-coat instead of evening coat—came and watched every gesture of the waiter who set down the two sardines and four olives. I do not know what position this frock-coated gentleman held. His duty may have been to stand guard over guests who seemed as if they were setting themselves out to make the waiters more human. Or he may have been an employee from an asylum for the insane, kept on the premises, lent out from the asylum as policemen, upon occasion, are lent out from the police office to give a note of blue to functions. Or he may have been a kind of chef-designer looking for new arrangements in food.

At anyrate he stood there and made some of the guests wonder who the deuce that big man was who sported the tasselled cane that they would have laughed at had they only been sure that he was not really as mighty as his carriage suggested.

Ettie was flattered.

The woman with the long corsets that held her rigid from neck to knees raised herself up by pressing her high heels into the carpet, and paid her bill, and waddled out in disgust, without tipping the waiter.

Ettie Wilson and Mapleton Wild moved splendidly through many courses and the lull hour of the place approached.

Wild began to experience a sense of expansion. An airiness came to him, as if he might, with a slight exercise of will, float like a bubble to the roof. The mirrors, he now observed, really soared. They were not merely stuck upon the walls. Evidently he would have to reconsider his opinion of the place as expressed to Ettie on his arrival. Evidently he was gaining the point of view necessary for appreciating this temple.

The emptying of chairs and divans aided the effect. If Wild was not progressing with his copy-collecting for the article "Is London Gay?" he

could at least memorise the menu for aid in an article suitable for *In the Ermine*—for in that journal, every week, there were always stories or articles with some high-sounding paragraphs after the style of : “ Silver, crystal, snowy linen ; these upheld oranges of Samarcand and pigeons’ eggs poached in Astrakhan caviare.”

Those who remained nestled more negligently on their divans, sipping coffee, and smoking the cigarette of digestion, gold-tipped ; or they ate cheese sullenly. All the waiters waned, were less perfunctory ; they grouped here and there in clusters and could be heard, occasionally, chatting in guttural accents.

A very obese man, sitting alone, grunted, and unbuttoned the lowermost button of his waistcoat.

Wild helped Ettie to more wine, and poured out more for himself, declaiming sacrilegiously upon the “ beady bubbles winking at the brim.”

Ettie grew still more engaging. She looked on Wild with eyes both luminous and dulled. She held her hands out on the tablecloth and, seeing him look upon them, asked for a finger-bowl. Wild watched her fingers in the water as a cat watches gold-fish. When she looked up and smiled, he chattered on the effect of cut crystal and water ripples. When she smiled again, sidewise, he added

a pretty speech about flesh tints. He had no eyes for the wavering reflection of the water in the bowl, where it played changefully, half-way up the elegant wall. His appreciation of art was blarney. This was merely the Wild who used to look at the more "human" girls in the park. I say "human" advisedly, having found, even in this day of aspiration, that the world likes very well to talk of "super-man," but by the word "human" means really "bestial" or "gluttonous," or "deceitful," or a hundred and one words at the opposite pole from "divine."

Ettie bent forward repeatedly as if to catch Wild's pictorial talk more clearly. She looked at herself in his eyes.

Mapleton Wild glanced left and right. The fat man had fallen asleep. At another table a man and woman sat, heads close, looking in each other's faces. A man, alone, in a corner, read a paper and fumbled about round it, feeling for his coffee-cup.

Wild bent forward and kissed Ettie Wilson slowly on the lips.

She had won ! She had won ! She was triumphant. She wished Ruth Winter could see this. She sat back. Her eyes flashed. She looked round the gilt and white magnificence. Then—

"I will not make a scene, Mr Wild," she said.
"I never expected such a thing."

He was imperturbable, trying to brazen it out. She looked at his left hand and saw the rings. The jewelled half-moon side of the engagement ring, which it was his habit to keep inwards, had drifted round into view ; and he, seeing the direction of her gaze, hastily turned the ring round so that the diamonds and rubies were hid.

She rose. This was undoubtedly the way to negotiate the affair. This calm dignity made a far bigger smash for him than a display of waving arms and a high note in the voice.

She pointed to the rings.

"I thought her memory——" She paused. "Mr Brough would not have done that," she said, modulating her voice to the exact note.

Mapleton Wild, seeing her rise, had half risen too, to help her on with her light cloak, impelled by mere force of habit. But at that speech, the Too Much instead of the Enough, he sat still. He felt crushed, broken, the most emptied of men. But he felt that she had hit too cruelly. She had not only hit, she had "extended." He might be broken, emptied ; but she should have left him to give himself that intimate thrust. To look at the rings had been stab enough.

He turned about now, looking for a waiter, caught the eye of the one who had attended to their wants, and beckoned. The waiter came running.

“Help the lady on with her dust-coat,” said Wild.

“Yes, sir.”

Ettie was furious.

“My bill,” she said.

The waiter glanced from one to the other, for men generally pay.

“And cigarettes for me,” said Wild. “I shall not be going yet.”

The waiter stood aside, totalling Ettie’s share upon a little tablet, then tore off the page and laid it upon his tray, presenting the bill to her thereon.

Ettie had awaited his miscalculation very erect, magnificent, looking at herself as she was shown in a mirror of the opposing wall, patting her hair to left, to right, to left again, filling the brief, but yet seemingly strainedly long, period that it took the waiter to make his miscalculation. She glanced at the bill now ; she examined her purse ; then she stood aghast.

“I’m afraid I——” she began.

Wild appropriated the bill.

“That’s all right,” he said. “You won. This ”

—he indicated the bill by holding it, crumpled, in his left hand, upraised—“makes no difference. You won—this is side-issue.”

The waiter stood back, bending at the waist.

As Ettie sailed out she thought to herself :

“It was a victory. I made up my mind to enslave him. I wish to goodness it had not been necessary, for I would have liked a few more of those kisses.” Then she laughed. “And I overdrew my exchequer too ! And he had to pay the bill.” Smiling, she ordered a taxi-cab so that Wild could hear the doorman whistling for it and surmise her departing from the door reclining gently and gracefully, a picture of fascination and allurements, but not for him. There was something overwhelmingly exhilarating in relishing his “insult” and crushing him for it. To think that she had led him to “insult” her, too, gave the final sparkle to the draught.

CHAPTER XIX: THE BLEEDING HEART

MAPLETON WILD was very, very sore.

He had come upon an experience now which affected him too deeply to admit of making a relief from its sting by writing an article under the impulse of the emotions it awakened.

He slept none that night. He stared out of his windows, wrapped in his dressing-gown, somewhat like Rodin's statue of Balzac; but not a statue of triumph and immensity like Rodin's. There he stood in his bedroom window-space, certainly erect and with head thrown back, but taking his punishment, not flaunting it.

Perhaps it was as well that he did not know that Ettie Wilson had laid a snare for him, had planned his downfall, for then it would have lost its value for him, a value beyond all articles such as, knowing Wild only fairly well so far, we might have expected him to outline to-night, articles on Man as clay in the hands of Beauty, Man ever turned to dust and derision before Woman, with the sailors of Odysseus turned to hogs before Circe for a classical allusion.

This that had come to him, he felt, as the night wore on and the moon looked down upon it between trees, was for the making of Mapleton Wild, not for the making of articles.

No, he would not let it mar him. It must make him.

He had insulted a woman—and had been rightfully snubbed. The thought that she had been unnecessarily cruel had passed from him now.

She had been right. That was all he considered.

When the stems of the trees brightened upon their eastern sides, ere the moon had dropped out of their middle foliage, but shone there, a white shield, in awful quiet, he passed through unspeakable hells of self-condemnation. As yet he had not dared to admit to himself, had not dared to consider the cause of the deepness of his torture. All night he tried to keep from looking into the deeps ; but sooner or later he must look there.

When the first birds twittered to the new day he cried out with a loud voice the name of his dead wife, and taking the two rings from his finger he put them away in a drawer.

No line of poet or sage came to his aid. He was left alone. No worldly lyric belittling the self-condemnatory spirit came dancing to him. No

consolation, not even Tennyson's "Men may rise on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things" murmured in his memory.

He had begun the night's wakefulness with a feeling of chagrin, Ettie uppermost. By the time dawn came Ettie was fading. Chagrin had given place to remorse. He had insulted his dead wife—that was his anguish. Ettie could think what she would—but his dead wife !

He was ashamed in the morning when Doris, combed and brushed by the housekeeper, ran to him and leapt up into his arms. He caught her up, turning his head away.

I know that there are persons who might wonder what all the bother was about ; but that was Mapleton Wild's way.

He could not work all that day. He cleaned his motor bicycle for something to do at least. When Doris came to him, somewhat tentatively requesting stories, he did his best ; but at end of the first story she looked at him wonderingly and said :

" And then ? "

" I'm afraid that's all," he said.

" Do you call that a story ? " she asked.

" Well—eh. I don't know. Is it not ? "

" I call it piffle," she said.

He laughed—his first laugh that day.

By the late post came a letter from Brough which made Wild's face go blank.

Evidently, he considered, Brough had, on receipt of that letter about Ettie Wilson, decided to ignore it. But he had, evidently, been told of Friday's restaurant scene by Ettie. And now, after a long silence, he wrote thus, immediately :

“DEAR WILD,—Evidently you are incapable of discussing ethics. You are personal. You are rude. I have no doubt but that you could write an article on ‘The Courtesy of Rudeness’ to make the groundlings admire your slick sophistries ; but that is neither here nor there. You are insolent and I have no use for you. If we lived in Kentucky I should simply write to you, ‘Sir, I shall shoot you on sight.’ As it is, I dismiss you from my memory.

“JOHN BROUGH.”

It had been sunless all day, the trees waiting for rain, and night fell grey and chill (for summer-time) upon Rus in Urbe.

Wild reconsidered his life, his recent life ; he had, he considered, made a mockery of his affection for his dead wife. Only a few weeks ago he had written to Brough that it would be madness for Brough to allow

himself to be enraptured by Ettie Wilson. The woman that he had considered not good enough for Brough, he had now played the cad to. The woman that he had not considered good enough for Brough, and had played the cad to, was evidently on sufficiently close terms with Brough already to "have no secrets from him." They were practically married ! He would be seeing the announcement in *The Morning Post* one of these days.

He read Brough's letter over again.

"I suppose he had to write like this—chivalrous fellow—regular Quixote—but as for his affianced—to the devil with her !"

Thus, under misconception, did Mapleton Wild drift down into purgatory. Thus, under misconception did he begin to climb out.

Suddenly he caught sight of his Pan upon the mantelpiece ; and, tossing his head, so that his tawny mane swept from left temple to right, like "Caolte tossing his burning hair," he consigned Ettie to the devil a second time.

He took up his little grinning desk Pan and looked at him, thoughtfully.

But the Sunday was gloomy. No friends called ; and he felt that he would be too lenient with himself if he went a-visiting.

For the sake of Doris he played a game of battle-dore, but could not bring to it the necessary concentration.

He smoked his meerschaum pipe. He smoked his corn-cob. He smoked one of a boxful of cherry pipes. He tried a cheroot, one of a boxful from an old friend who had gone to Burma to edit a paper there ; but there came to him no Asiatic content, inhaling its fumes.

He sharpened pencils for Doris (who was drawing on his blotting-pad) as quickly as she broke their points—and bored her by his lack of comment on the everlastingness of his occupation.

When Doris went out with the housekeeper, to pay a call upon a frog who lived in the pond on the common, he walked upstairs and opened the drawer where he had put his dead wife's rings. He looked at them, frowning. He closed the drawer. The house was so quiet now, he being alone, that one could almost believe that a spirit of rest had entered it, and that he was not alone. He drew the casement curtains, to let in as much of the late light as possible, rather than turn on the electric light and shut out that leaden light. A bell began to clatter to the confusion of little trees and half-revealed roofs under the great sky, and he looked out on the dying

day. The trees stood very still, and only when close at hand could any passer-by, who might have cared for trees, observe that every leaf was twiddling gently in a slight wind that promised rain.

Those of the community whose callings allowed of their wearing peacock-clothes only upon the Sunday were hurrying to chapel or church. The urgent little bell, that seemed always on the point of stopping, put a something frantic, a kind of petty excitation, into the motions of the church and chapel goers. A drop or two of rain also faintly alarmed. They might reach chapel or church before the bell stopped, but the rain would, very likely, be on by the time they came out again to expel from their lungs the odour of unaired apparel and morocco—and silk hats might yet be spotted, ribbons and feathers be streaked and bedraggled.

Mapleton Wild was so utterly broken by his downfall that, as he noted them, he wondered if perhaps, after all, they were right. He was not by any means an old man ; but it was a far cry to the days of his boyhood, and, though impressions lived with him, incidents faded.

But his good gods saved him from the abyss.

A spot or two of rain flecked the window ; the

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bells ceased ; he opened the casement wide, and smelt of the rose-bush scent that came up luxuriously. And he whispered, thrusting out his head :

“ ‘ The wind doth blow to-day, my love,
And a few small drops of rain.’ ”

CHAPTER XX: "WHAT'S BECOME OF WAR- ING?"

THE two top rearward flights of the W. D. & H. offices had been rebuilt, and were palatial.

It is an ill wind that blows no one any good.

The loss by fire had been trivial. The gain was greater. Those of the staff who worked in the higher regions had lighter rooms now.

The pigeons were all reinstated in a loft rebuilt, swept and garnished, whitewashed, and with much fresh shell strewn upon the floor.

But Brough came not back.

He lay recovering of his burns, for three weeks, during which period many visitors from the offices called to see him. A brother of the W. D. & H. elevator-man attended to him, an ex-soldier, a seven years' service man whose love of the *flair* of life had led him into the army, whose love of the *flair* of life had not been slain cynically there—although he had never seen service, but had spent his time in gymnasia and libraries and sentry-boxes for three years, and anon, for four, pressed the

trousers, folded the coats, found the lost studs and so forth of an officer who thought a deal of him. These duties he did not jeer at, for in the performance of them he came in sight of a walk of life hitherto unknown to him; and he was a born observer.

When Brough grew better, able to sit up and talk, the elevator-man's brother, Brough's bodyguard, experienced what is called "one of the times of his life."

The convalescent Brough talked of nothing but far lands and high seas. There was a pathos in his voice as he told these sunburnt tales of his *wanderjahr*. He spoke of these old doings somewhat, but not exactly, as old dapper gentlemen who wear corsets and have their faces massaged speak of girls and of the joy of being young.

At the end of the fourth week of Brough's absence from the office Cromarty received a letter from him as follows :—

"MY DEAR CROMARTY,—As I am not coming back to the offices, and wish to resign, I am returning herewith the four weeks' money which you have so kindly sent me each Saturday morning. Also I enclose, in lieu of notice—I think that is right—a

week’s salary. I would have written sooner, but have let almost all correspondence slide. Yours most sincerely,

“JOHN BROUGH.”

Cromarty, on receipt of this letter, nearly wept.

He rose and closed his door.

He handed the letter to his secretary, Ethel Royston, and said :

“The man is mad. I must go and see him.”

But the telephone bell rang and drew Cromarty into a tale of a colliery disaster in Fife.

The Scottish Edition of *The Weekly One* was printed a day earlier than the English. It contained two pages specially devoted to Scottish matters and it must go to press to-night, Wednesday. If Cromarty could not obtain, immediately, an account of the disaster for his paper, it would appear in Scotland as one far behind the times. Scottish papers, that could hold up “going to press” longer, would have columns of facts about the “disaster,” and his Scottish Edition would give but the barest mention. He had to wait on at the offices, seeing to that disaster for the proprietor and the public, and when he had four columns of print, under a scare-head on that subject, somebody found a member

of Parliament in navy's clothes, either drunk or drugged, in a Poplar lodging-house, and Cromarty had to stay on to make certain that that news was skilfully handled and the word "alleged" not omitted in places where its omission might bring trouble to the W. D. & H. offices.

At last, late at night, he mounted to Brough's flat and was confronted by a door with a slit in it for letter-box. He looked through the slit and saw the barren corridor, and, through an open door opposite, simply moonlight, floating on a bare floor.

Cromarty called upon the landlord next day ; but the landlord could tell him nothing except that Mr Brough had paid his rent and departed, he knew not whither. The furniture had been sold, he believed, not removed to another dwelling.

The office elevator-man, put upon the trail, could not find his exciting brother. He had lived in a room in Camden Town and on Tuesday had gone back thither for his belongings, for he had retained the room while attending to Brough. He had paid his landlady, upon that visit, a week's rent in lieu of notice, and departed. She had asked what he would like her to do in the matter of letters that might arrive for him. By his reply she was somewhat afraid that he had been imbibing ; though she

had never noticed (“ I have to say it, for I’m an honest woman, see ? But I don’t like anyone to say anythink prejuiceal about anybody ”), never noticed all the while that he had lodged with her any sign of an addiction to liquor upon him before.

Passenger lists of all steamers were examined, but without any discovery of importance ; and Cromarty was averse to going further in his search, for further inquiries might have suggested (despite all his protestations that he was seeking a dear friend) that he was in search of an absconding debtor.

After all, too, Brough’s life was his own.

The office mourned him.

The proprietor, hearing of the affair, said Brough was a fool to send that money back, and dropped a hint that the office should pass round the hat and raise a subscription for Brough if he was ever found—as a tribute to the way he had remembered the pigeons that everyone else had forgotten.

“ Silly, in a way,” he said, “ but these are the kind of things that give the human element to life—people like them.”

Ruth Winter, too ill with rheumatism to see any of the office people who came to inquire how she progressed, heard nothing of Brough’s flight.

Mapleton Wild, when he heard of it, on a visit to

the offices, frowned at mention of Brough's name, but, hearing the story, held high his head and considered something, with an expression of face that puzzled Cromarty, and then quoted :

“ ‘ What's become of Waring since he gave us all the slip,
Chose land-travel, or sea-faring
Rather than tread up and down
Any longer London Town.’ ”

The only person who could have cast any light on Brough's disappearance was Ettie Wilson, editing *Lovely Woman* in Ruth's absence ; but she did not.

She saw Wild upon the occasion of his visit, happening to go into Cromarty's room while he was there.

They bowed each to each, in the wonted way.

Cromarty had to leave his room for a moment or two, because he wanted to speak forcibly to someone in another part of the building, and he never spoke forcibly over a telephone to anyone : when he wanted to be forcible, very forcible, he either called the erring one to his room or stalked, with tautened thews, to the erring one's room.

Miss Royston was busy proof-reading, but not so engrossed as to fail to feel the strained silence after Cromarty, with a curt “ Back in a moment,” had plunged away.

Nor was she so engrossed as to fail to note the intonation in Miss Wilson’s voice when that lady suddenly ejaculated :

“ Oh, Mr Wild—your rings ! Have you lost them ? ”

She noted also the intonation in Wild’s voice when he replied—ultra-courteously for so deep a phrase, grandiose perhaps, and physically impossible, but, nevertheless, deep to him :

“ I wear them in my heart, now, Miss Wilson. They are not lost.”

“ Oh, I thought perhaps you had lost them,” said Ettie.

Wild made no reply. Then Cromarty returned, and the tide of life flowed on, but without ripples.

CHAPTER XXI: THE MOULTING BOA

MRS WINTER entered the large rear sitting-room (that gave access to the conservatory, from which a flight of steps descended to the garden), and saw her daughter stumbling forward there in a way that betokened something more amiss than dusk in the room. With an unwontedly abrupt gesture, born of sudden anxiety, she switched on the electric light. The radiance of the three shaded globes in the centre of the room disclosed a daughter quite clearly ill.

“ You go to bed,” said Mrs Winter.

Ruth made no response, merely walked to the door, rather evading the chairs than passing between them ; and walked up to bed like a returning somnambulist. Mrs Winter, looking after her, decided that she was at least competent to reach her bed alone, so dived down to the kitchen, to interrupt her maid-servant, in the midst of a narrative of crime and passion, with a demand for hot water. Ten minutes after Ruth had dragged herself upstairs, Mrs Winter followed, carrying a hot-water jar. She almost

forgot that it was scalding her hands, because of the reception she had from Ruth in my lady's boudoir. The scene would surely have made an ideal poster to advertise a stirring new serial, full of human interest and tingling with sensation, for the W. D. and H. house. Ruth sat up, somewhat Lady Macbethish, somewhat Desdemonaish, somewhat distrait, looking pathetically small and harmless in the white bed; amazingly childish, with her hair fallen about her shoulders. Mrs Winter halted in the doorway, startled, for, with feverish vigour, Ruth thrust out an arm, a delicately, an exquisitely moulded forearm; it showed in the wide sleeve of her nightdress; and said she:

“He is not mad: it is a calumny!”

Having thus spoken she lay back upon the pillows; and Mrs Winter recovered only sufficiently to thrust the hot-water bottle under the blankets, where it burned Ruth's feet.

Ruth gave a jump, sat erect again, and again spoke, with great solemnity, her face pallid save for two burning spots in her cheeks; her eyes so very brilliantly grave that, had she been a man of powerful physique, instead of, as she was later to call herself, “a wee body,” Mrs Winter might have agitatedly thought of summoning assistance. As it was, she

was but filled with anguish at the pathetic figure in the bed.

“ You would make him insane if you had your way with him. I don’t believe God will let you,” said Ruth.

Thereafter, for many days, Ruth knew nothing of the affairs of the world and of Fleet Street.

At last there came a return to consciousness ; at last there began a slow recovery, and then there came an afternoon when she awakened from a restful sleep and found a fire crackling cosily in the grate, and was aware that the blinds were drawn. She felt as though she floated upon a cloud ; wondrously ethereal, adorably disembodied, but she was still in her room. The firelight cast the shadow of the mantelpiece upward on to the white ceiling. That monstrous shadow wavered, stretched forth, dwindled, wavered. The fire emitted little clicks and crackles like a fire that has been burning a long time. A very great peace seemed to envelop the house. Ruth considered that it was not morning, that it was afternoon, judging by the light, the pensive afternoon light of a London day when the sun is diffident. She tried to sit up ; and then she knew that she was less etherealised than weak ;

she was not gloriously disembodied, yet alive ; she remembered that she had been ill.

But how quiet it was, how extremely quiet !

She could hear a motor car, hear it in the distance, coming nearer, not far off, coming nearer, and yet remote—then the sound died.

From another direction she heard the pad of hoofs. She could imagine high-stepping horses. By the sound they would be well matched—she visualised them as roan—prancing before a brougham. The rhythmic sound drew nearer, with something stirring in it, like far-off kettle-drums—then abruptly expired. It was strange.

And now there came to her ears the faint sound of feet on the stairs. When a board creaked under their stealthy progress it made more sound than the footfalls. But it mattered little who it was that thus crept to the room, thought Ruth ; she had no part at all with people walking about, loudly or quietly. With the faintest smile she wondered if this sound also would advance just a little closer and then cease abruptly and inexplicably.

No ; in this instance all was rational. The door opened and Mrs Winter entered ; and behind was a doctor, gliding into the chamber, round the half-opened door, like an interrogation mark.

"Hullo, mother!" said Ruth.

"Ah!" said the doctor. "This is better."

"I wish you would explain one thing to me," said Ruth, "and that is, why I have the sensation as of hearing sounds come near and then abruptly stop. It's queer."

The explanation was simplicity itself.

After Mapleton Wild, visiting the office of the W. D. and H. people, had made, as told in the last chapter, his serious, if grandiose, reply to Ettie's stinging solicitation, Cromarty returned to the room, fussed among the papers on his desk, and said :

"Eh, ah, Miss Wilson. Excuse me a moment, Wild, I want to see this lady—no—no—don't go away, just a minute."

Wild, with debonair inclination of his head, stepped aside, wrist on hip, hat and grey gloves in hand, chin in collar, and eyes as though looking up at his brows. Miss Royston, at her table behind the chief, smoothed out a curly strip of proofs and looked up to inquire if Mr Wild had heard the news regarding the editress of *Lovely Woman*. Wild elevated his brows and wheeled round to Miss Royston.

"N—o."

"She is very ill," said Ethel.

“ Ill ? Was she mixed up in the fire ? ” Wild asked.

“ No ; she caught a chill after the office picnic.”

“ Is it serious ? ”

Miss Royston gave him the latest bulletin, with which she was conversant ; for every day someone from the offices called at the house in Maida Vale to ask for the editress of *Lovely Woman*, and, on returning, passed through the rooms, reporting all that there was to report of the invalid.

“ One of the girls has just come back from her home,” said Ethel. “ She reports that the doctor hopes she may——”

“ What ! As bad as that ? What does the doctor say ? ”

“ He believes she will recover if she is kept quiet.”

“ Who is the doctor ? ” asked Wild, like one taking over the reins of rule.

“ I don’t know.”

“ I hope he is a capable man.”

“ He says that, with quiet, now, she should pull through.”

Quiet !

Wild remembered how, in days gone by, when he wrote for socialistic papers, he had once seen, upon a day penurious of ideas, many deep inches,

many quiet yards, of tan carpeting the roadway before a west-end mansion, and had written an article, for one of these organs, upon “Tan *versus* Tenements,” showing, on the one hand, a nabob of Leadenhall Street, or of Wall Street, or of the Bourse—for his nabob was a symbol—lying ill in a castle all moated with silence and deep tan, and, on the other hand, the single rooms of innermost Bethnal Green, or of the backward tenements Bowery way, or the cellars of Montmartre, with two or three families hugger-mugger on the bug-eaten boards. The editor had handed back the article with a remark to the effect that, while it was ably written, the author’s sympathy was all with the Tan.

Wild now stood and considered. And anon, closing his eyes firmly, then opening them vigorously, and with an upward jerk of his head, he laid down his hat, put his gloves in it and begged for a sheet of paper. At the top of that sheet he wrote, in his best caligraphy :

“A Subscription for Tan to be laid before the House of Miss Winter, Editress of *Lovely Woman*.”

Ettie Wilson rustled out of the room as he was thus employed, stooping over a clear corner of Miss

Royston's table, and Cromarty whirled his revolving chair round and said :

“ And now, sir, honourable sir, at your service.”

Wild put the cap on his fountain pen and turned.

“ Cromarty,” said he, “ will you set this ball a-rolling ? ”

“ What's this—heh ? ” Cromarty inquired, taking the proffered memorandum form gingerly. He glanced at it. Then “ Splendid ! ” he passed verdict. He looked up at Wild, then, as if his attention had somehow been held, he looked Wild up and down with deeper interest ; his eyes glittered ; a suggestion of fleering or of banter came to the corners of his mouth.

“ Did you ever have tan before your door, Wild ? ” he asked.

“ Never,” said Wild, and his tone was as the tone of resignation.

Cromarty humped himself up and chuckled ; then, twirling his chair round so that again he faced his dishevelled desk, he took up a pen from the multitude of pens and pencils there, and headed the sheet with his signature.

The following evening Wild stood at a corner in Maida Vale, N.W., stood there so bulky a figure, so monumental and watchful that, by

two civilians he was mistaken, in the gloom, for a policeman, and then mistaken for a possible criminal by a policeman who strolled past, lamp on belt. From the shadow of his helmet the constable eyed Wild furtively.

What the suspicious policeman saw, as he passed Wild, and peered so at him, was a man smiling a cryptic smile, or less smiling than looking beatified. A taxi-cab was passing over the tan before Ruth's house ; and not a sound could be heard save a gentle purr, something like that of a drowsy kettle.

The policeman strayed on, and at the next corner wheeled, and surveyed the cloaked loiterer, lest anything was to happen later on upon his beat. He studied Wild fixedly at long range, so that he might remember not only his face but his figure.

Two empty pantechnicons came rattling from the distance, came eastward with a far rumble, and Wild started with real anxiety. Why did people have so much furniture that they required to hire two great moving houses to carry, close-packed, their furniture from one dwelling house to another, when they removed ? He would write an article ! It was ridiculous ! The sound of the rumbling pantechnicons—sounds as of a hundred barbaric tom-toms smitten at random—might snap the thin-spun life

of some fragile . . . The phrases stopped short, for the first pantechnicon came to the tan—the second also—they passed over it with scarcely a sound.

“Splendid ! Magnificent ! A sublime *pianissimo* !” said Wild ; and taking a deep breath and expanding his chest, and regathering his cloak, he passed away, elated, homeward.

But, alas ! (at least, alas for Ruth), Mapleton Wild was to have more joy from the tan than she that evening. How often do we not observe the wisdom of these words—that it is more blessed to give than to receive ! While Wild rejoiced over that carpet of silence, little Daisy Woods, nervous, smirking, elated, grave, was being led upstairs in the Maida Vale house. It was a great moment for Daisy Woods ; it was a red-letter evening of her life. To her, as to many, success brought success. Just a month ago, a day or two after the picnic, the holocaust, and the flight of pigeons, the girl whose duty it was to assort the editorial correspondence went, as they say, and got married. Cromarty, ever eager to give people the opportunity to rise in the world, considered whether there was anyone in the building who might fill her place, bethought him of that Daisy Woods who had been brought under his notice by Ettie Wilson. He told Ethel Royston to send Daisy up to see him, and

when Daisy came forth from his sanctum she looked prettier and younger. Next day she dressed her hair with more care than usual, manicured with more care, feeling more important ; and, on arriving at the offices, instead of going into the despatching-room, and there donning a large print apron, she ascended in the elevator, passed along to the correspondence-room, whose walls were composed of tiers of pigeonholes in a stage of fulness or depletion, and there donned a long stately wrapper, and became a member, if a humble member, of the editorial staff. I don't think Cromarty philosophised at all over the matter. It was only a small item in the day's work, and there was little time to philosophise over the fact that if Ettie Wilson had not slighted Daisy, and thus brought her under his notice (over the affair of the muff and the alleged dog), Daisy's little timid figure would not have popped up in his mind's eye when he wondered if anyone in the house to whom the vacant berth would be an advance was worthy to be offered it, gifted to fill it. Cromarty was but one of the cogs in the wheel ; he was but unconsciously serving Kind Destiny. Daisy had called before this at the Maida Vale house, as had many other of her colleagues ; but she was the first visitor from Fleet Street to be invited upstairs to

Ruth's bedroom. It was supposed that a visitor from the offices would now do Ruth no harm, might, indeed, do her good. So, up the broad stairs, to a landing where two brass candlesticks shone restfully on a polished table set in a window recess, and thence up a narrower flight of stairs, Daisy mounted behind the soft-treading maid, glad to hear that Ruth was so far improved, and at the same time thrilling at her own advance in the world. Perhaps, if she persevered, if she read a lot, and thought a lot and kept her eyes wide open to see how things were done, she might (who knew ?) one day be an editress. No ! No ! She was conceited ! Or, she called it to herself, meaning "Conceited " (but with the vocabulary of a Londoner who dwells in one of those districts of London where, on Sundays, the bell of the crumpet-man is heard and the shrimp-seller goes about the streets), called it " Proud."

The maid looked round the half-open door of Ruth's room.

" Come in," said Ruth.

Another voice also said, " Come in," and startled Daisy.

" She's got company !" thought Daisy.

" Miss Woods to see you," said the maid, and Daisy entered.

Mrs Winter, who was sitting by the fire, rose. Ruth, lying back on packed pillows, said : " I am glad to see you, Daisy."

" Oh, I'm so glad to hear you are better," said Daisy, in a subdued voice.

Mrs Winter was glad to hear the subdued tones, for she had feared a loud-voiced visitor who might injure Ruth. One never knew nowadays what women would be like. There were women who, even when quite close to a person with whom they carried on a conversation, shouted instead of talked. There were even women worse than that, who screamed and laughed simultaneously all the time—perhaps with nervousness ; one should be lenient—but they were fatiguing even for people in perfect health. But now, having been introduced, and further reassured by the gentleness with which Daisy took her hand, Mrs Winter said : " I'll leave you with your visitor, Ruth." And then to Daisy, in a way that endeared her to that affectionate chit of a lass (like animated thistledown, she seemed, with her feathery boa) : " Don't let her get excited. Don't let her tire herself, Miss Woods. You are her first visitor from Fleet Street."

The conversation, after Mrs Winter, with a glance at the fire, a glance round the room, a very swift

glance at Daisy's boa, had departed, was a series of spasmodic congratulations on returning health and assurances that it was returning. Then it drifted into something like this :

Daisy.—" Oh yes ; things go on as usual."

Ruth.—" Everybody well ? "

Daisy.—" Yes ; everybody's well, I think. Mr Cromarty runs up and down frowning to himself and nodding to people just as usual. You don't have to mind Mr Cromarty. If he doesn't nod, it doesn't mean anything. He's got an awful lot to do." (*A pause.*) " Oh, of course, you've heard about Mr Brough ? "

Ruth.—" No " (*trying to appear lukewarm in her interest*).

Daisy.—" About the fire, I mean."

Ruth.—" The fire ? " (*Feeling her breath catch.*)

Daisy.—" Oh, of course not. It was after the picnic. You've not been back since. . . . Oh, my ! You do look pale, Miss Winter."

Ruth.—" I'm all right. What were you going to tell me about Mr— about the fire ? "

Daisy.—" Mr Brough let the pigeons out. Nobody knew, till after, what he went up for. Down in the court nobody could see. If anybody had been upstairs, across the court, oppo-sight, they could have

seen. I would have liked to have seen him ; he's a very fine gentleman, and that polished ! ”

Ruth.—“ Was he—hurt ? ”

Daisy.—“ Oh, he got down again. You see, the fire was in the top. He got up all right ; but it was coming down—you know what I mean.”

Ruth.—“ What happened to him ? ”

Daisy.—“ He got burnt.”

Ruth.—(No “ Oh ! ” that type can put on a page can suggest the note in *Ruth's* voice.)

Daisy.—“ You mustn't take on ! I don't mean burnt really. I mean to say—you know !—I mean he was burnt a little. He went home. You know I don't think that place he lived in was healthy. It wasn't modin. I mean to say—you know—well, he's left there now.”

Ruth (feeling as if her body was made of water, and her heart afloat).—“ Yes ? ”

Daisy.—“ They got him into a motor after he came down. They gave him three cheers for letting the pigeons out. I never knew there were pigeons up there. Did you, Miss Winter ? ”

Ruth.—“ They cheered ! ” (*Her voice broke.*)
“ Yes, I knew.”

Daisy. “ Well, you would ! Miss Wilson went home with him. I don't know—perhaps I shouldn't

feel that way, but what did she want going in the motor with him ? ”

Ruth (*her lips very white*).—“ I don’t know.”

Daisy.—“ Miss Royston went too.”

Ruth.—“ Oh yes.”

Daisy.—“ It’s a funny thing, but I like Miss Royston for going,”

Ruth.—“ Ethel is a nice girl ” (*like a copy-book headline*).

Daisy.—“ But Miss Wilson going seems to me forward. But there ! I wonder where he is now ? ”

Ruth.—“ Is he better ? ”

Daisy.—“ Oh yes. They asked for him every day nearly. He got on splendid. But he’s just disappeared.”

Ruth.—“ Disappeared ! ”

Daisy.—“ Yes ; he sent in his resignation one day, after he had been away over three weeks. Mr Cromarty went round to see him the day after. And the bird had flown ! Nobody knows where. All his furniture’s gone—flat empty. I hear that Mr Cromarty felt bad about it. Miss Royston told me he was sulky all day, and forgot things and kept on sitting back in his chair, and then when he had heaps to attend to, forgetting it, you know, and saying : ‘ Where’s the D fool gone anyhow ? ’ ”

And then Daisy stopped abruptly, fearing that she should not have bowdlerised Cromarty's phrase in that way, but have omitted even the suggestion that Cromarty had not been content to call him plain "fool."

"Everybody else is well, you say?" said Ruth presently, diplomatic now, though weak.

"Oh yes," Daisy gratefully and promptly replied, glad to see that if she had made a mistake she was not slighted.

"Nobody else has left the office? Mr Fribble still there?"

"Oh yes; at least I seen him—let me see—oh, the day before yesterday I saw him."

"Mr Blandley—how's he?"

"He seems all right. He never speaks much—just sometimes when I take the letters he says 'Thank you,' and then looks up as if he didn't know I was there, and calls 'Thank you' after me again."

"Miss Wilson—you mentioned her just now," said Ruth—"I suppose she is still at the offices? I mean, she has not resigned?"

"I don't think so," said Daisy.

Ruth drew up weakly on the pillows. "You don't think? When did you see her last?"

Daisy, desiring to be precise, puckered her brows. "Let me see. Oh yes, she's still there. I noticed the smell of Parma violets yesterday."

"Thank God!" said Ruth inexplicably; and she sagged back again, and her arms fell limp on the coverlet.

Daisy leapt to her feet, and rushed to the bed. "Oh, she's dead!" she gave a whispered cry.

She crumpled her handkerchief, which she had clutched all the while in a hand. She flung it from one hand to the other, squeezing it more distractedly after each catch.

"She's dead!" she cried.

She looked for signs of a bell, saw not a modern bell-push that answers to the pressure of a finger, but an elderly bell-pull, a rope hanging by the wall, made of plaited red cord and decorated at its end with a yellow cord tassel. It was a daring thing to do in a strange house, she considered, all a-flutter, but necessity knows no manners. If she ran downstairs assuredly she would fall and break her neck, her knees knocked together *that* badly, she was *that* upset—she laid hold of the bell-rope and pulled. Having decided to pull, she pulled so vigorously that the leaping clatter that responded in the basement smote her with terror of her deed. So energetic was

it, however, that it served its purpose : it brought Mrs Winter—running ; it brought the maid—running ; it brought Mr Winter, he who had retired too soon and, in idleness, had the air of a valetudinarian—shuffling, and snuffling, and wanting to know if he could do anything.

At sight of humanity to the rescue, Daisy Woods seemed to alter her opinion.

“ She’s fainted ! ” she broke out.

“ So she has ! ” said Mrs Winter. “ Smelling salts ! Oh, I’ll get them. You’ll only look for them ! ” The maid and Mrs Winter collided in the doorway, passed out running, wedged together.

And then Miss Daisy Woods had an inspiration, her own timidity soothed, and her Cockney alertness re-established.

“ Happy thought ! My moulting boa-r ! ” she cried, and gathered three feathers that lay beside the chair on which she had been sitting, thrust them in the fire, then held their sticky and singed remains under Ruth’s nose.

It was an incident for Mrs Winter to narrate to Ruth later, when smelling-salts had brought the cause of all this flutter again to consciousness, and Daisy, with tear-filled eyes, vowing she would never forgive herself for talking so much, not to be com-

forted by all Ruth's assurances that no blame rested with her, had departed. Mrs Winter narrated it simply as nurses narrate any foolish little tale, to bring a smile—if but a wan smile—to the faces of the weary.

CHAPTER XXII: CHANGE AND MUTABILITY

TROUBLES did not come singly to Ruth at Maida Vale.

While she was convalescent, able to write little more than an occasional article on fashions in which she had no interest, her father delivered himself into the hands of surgeons.

In vain Ruth reminded him of his sister-in-law, how she had been condemned to death years ago unless she were immediately operated upon, how she yet lived, not operated upon. But Mr Winter seemed to think that such flukes could not occur twice in one clan.

It is terrible to shake hands with a relative, close the door of his cab, wave to him, see the cab trundle away, the flap behind rise and a hand wave there—and then he never come back again.

After Mr Winter died it was found that he had not as much money as people imagined, and Ruth and her mother had to leave the house for monetary reasons if for no other.

Also Ruth's doctor advised change of air. She

had faith in him because he looked doubtfully upon the knife, and often prescribed a glass of cold water first thing in the morning where other medical men might have prescribed coloured water procurable from a chemist. Only "professional etiquette" had kept him from advising Mr Winter to go on living. Mr Winter had not asked his opinion. And all Ruth's entreaties to her father that he should see her doctor had been in vain. Some high-standing country place was the advice of this doctor to Ruth.

Thus it was that Mapleton Wild, out with Doris one sunny afternoon, came upon Ruth sitting on that stile beside which Brough had voiced his great devotion while Wild read him an article upon a Great Soldier lately dead.

She sat upon the top step, holding the upright pole supplied for those who crossed to balance themselves, and looked across the fields ; saw, at top of a green crest, among trees, a whitewashed farm show blue and purple and elusive gold in its walls ; saw the gold ball of the sun hang in the wood behind it ; saw, in the half stream, half ditch, at the bottom of the field, sunset glow reflected in the water ; saw, near at hand, level rays light up the tops of pollard willows ; and the lower parts, in contrast with the gold above,

were a smoky blue. One great elm cast a shadow like a monstrous map of Europe.

"There is an infinite sadness in the afternoon," Ruth reflected. "These shadows stretching out, longer and longer, will fade slowly away and night come. Oh, I wonder, I wonder where Mr Brough is. I was so careful not to let him know. When he mentioned Hastings even, I didn't say anything. I wanted to say that I had spent my kid days there, but I didn't want to make links between us. No—I never tried to make one. That day he bought the Toby jug—oh, I was near him then. He didn't seem to know. He took it all for granted. I wonder what he would have said if I had cried when I had to leave him at the office! How these tree shadows do stretch and stretch. I think afternoon is awfully sad. It's peaceful, it's quiet, but it's awfully lonely."

"Well! Well! Miss Winter," said Wild, "I am glad to see you so far afield."

"So you know our part of the country!" Ruth ejaculated, hopping down from the stile lightly (despite the recent rheumatism), as a ballet dancer descends from a flight.

Wild, looking at her, had a thought in abeyance.

"I don't understand. Our part? I thought

that the proprietorial air could be adopted only by me—for I am not merely a pilgrim here. I am a high priest of the shrine.”

“I did not know,” said Ruth.

Doris, in abeyance, clinging to her father, had been examining Ruth. She now approached and, looking up, and holding forth a podgy hand, inquired :

“Will you come and have tea with me ? I am just going home to tea.”

Wild felt as if Ruth reminded him of something. Almost did he ask her to step up on the stile again, and again alight and sweep toward him, neck graciously bent forward, white skirts fanning out. She recalled somebody else, he thought. Or was it a picture that she recalled ? Of course he could not request a repetition of the movement ! He discarded the rummaging, recalling, ferreting mood, which was much like the mood awakened by searching for a word, having it on the tongue’s tip.

“Do come to tea with me,” said Doris. “I’m going home to order tea for father.”

Ruth laughed. Wild laughed.

“I second the invitation,” said Wild.

“I think you had better come with me,” said Ruth to Doris. “My mother will expect me.”

“ You have a mother,” said Doris, in a child’s tone that might be either question or statement.

“ But I don’t understand. Are you living in the neighbourhood ? ” Wild asked.

“ Yes.” She nodded. “ We have been here a fortnight now.”

“ Where shall we go to tea ? ” asked Doris.

“ I propose,” said Wild to her, speaking to her as if they were equals, “ that, seeing you want Miss Winter to come and have tea with you, we all go and invite her mother to come too.”

And so began a friendship between Ruth Winter, aged twenty-five, and Doris Wild, aged eight.

CHAPTER XXIII: ON FRIENDSHIP

THE friendship continued. It cannot be said that it ripened. It merely continued to be what it had been at the moment that Doris, satisfied by her scrutiny of Ruth, advanced and held up her hand to that lady, inviting her to tea.

Almost every day Doris tripped over to see Auntie Winter; and now and then she invited Ruth and Mrs Winter to tea with her. The formula was generally :

“ You have to come to tea with me the day after to-morrow.”

“ Oh, my dear, just you come over here.”

“ Father says yes. I told him I wanted you to come and he was quite agribble, he said.”

Thus we have Mrs Winter sitting in an easy-chair at Rus in Urbe, taking a book at a time from Doris, and at receipt of each being told :

“ Father did that.”

These were the collections of manuscripts, recovered from typist or printer, cleaned carefully with india-rubber and white bread and sedately bound in panelled calf.

“These are all his written books,” said Doris at last. “He has also one printed book. Another is going to be printed soon, and on the front page he is going to tell the printer to print ‘To Doris,’ so that when I am a little grey old woman, he says, I shall be able to read it.”

“That is very nice, my dear,” said Mrs Winter, loading her lap with the proffered books.

Wild, meantime, was showing Ruth some of his treasured possessions.

“This old Bible,” he said, “bound in pigskin, I really cherish chiefly for its broad margins and clear printing. It contains the apocryphal books. No great monetary value; but I like the type. The stool is an ordinary ‘kirk stool.’ I sometimes amuse myself by thinking it may have been thrown at the head of John Knox; but of course that is only fancy. Do you like this drawing of Claude Monet?”

“Very much.”

“It looks almost like an original when the curtains are drawn—because of the way I have mounted it. It is really torn out of an old magazine. Mr Brough, on one of the few occasions that he came down here, liked it very much. Poor Brough!”

“Have you heard of him recently?” asked Ruth, looking intensely calm.

Wild looked solemnly at Ruth and said :

“ Have you not heard ? ”

“ No, what ? ” she asked, and caught a chair-back and held it, and then stretched out her hand, switched the electric light on and off, on and off, and did not know that she was doing so. Such behaviour was unusual for Ruth, for she was a lady self-trained to passivity, and mistress of her gestures.

Wild pretended not to see the electric light flashing palely twice in the sunlit room ; but Doris looked up at the electrolier and laughed joyfully. She would play with the switch so, when tall enough. She looked up at Mrs Winter, anxious that that stately lady with the old-age spread beginning to show, should enjoy also. She found Mrs Winter looking reproachfully at Ruth, looking at Ruth with the expression that teachers reserve for fidgeting girls—and so Doris became reserved.

“ Sit down, Miss Winter,” said Wild. “ I should not keep you standing to look at my household gods. I should bring them to you as Doris brings hers to Mrs Winter. Doris, do relieve Mrs Winter of that load on her lap. . . . Yes, I was in the W. D. & H. offices recently and heard that he had disappeared.”

“ Oh, what a relief—eh—I’m so glad—— I mean—— What do you mean by disappeared ? ”

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“Left the country, I take it,” said Wild. “You know about the fire?”

“Yes; I heard of that and wondered how he was progressing.”

“He got a man to look after him, something of a rolling stone, like himself. He sent in his resignation to Cromarty a week or two later, and accompanying his letter of resignation was all the salary that had been sent to him from the office while he was ill. He sent also a week’s salary in lieu of notice. I am told,” he said, erecting his head a little haughtily, “that the proprietor laughed at that Quixotry and suggested that a subscription should be raised among the staff for Brough, a token of esteem from us all. I think it was quite unnecessary for the proprietor to make such a suggestion. The staff appreciates—and yet—and yet—perhaps I am unjust to the proprietor; perhaps I should look upon his suggestion as quite genial, or even as, perhaps, ebullient.”

Ruth scarcely noticed this ingenuous comment, too eager to lead the talk on farther.

“Is a subscription being raised?” she asked. “Though I don’t suppose he wants any token of esteem,” she added.

“Ah,” said Wild, “tokens of esteem should always

be accepted, just as tokens of disesteem should always be ignored. They have nothing to do with the person esteemed or disesteemed, and whether he put them in the waste-paper basket, or file them for reference, is a matter for him to decide privately. Pardon me just a minute," and he moved gracefully round his guests over to his desk and noted something on his writing-pad, probably the germ of an airy essay, chock-full of illuminating truth and aggravating falsehood, not to be ignored.

"Yes," he said, coming back again and sitting down beside Ruth, "I have a great esteem for John Brough, a great esteem. Of course I hold certain reservations of opinion regarding him—but that is the way with everybody. An unquestioning friendship is, of course, merely an infatuation—um—yes." He held his chin, in the attitude of reverie. Then abruptly, like "Caolte tossing his burning hair," tossed he his head and said :

"Just after his advent at the W. D. & H. offices I visited him and our talk drifted to the famous houses of London. Most young men visiting London, I think, are more interested in the—in—eh—— I found him a highly intelligent man. When I asked him if he intended to make London his home he told me that, as for that, the world was his home, and the

roar of London sounded very faint even from one of London's own attics. He wished to stay long enough to see some old houses in which interesting men had lived. I asked him, 'For example?' and his first famous house rather astonished me. He wanted to see the house in old Highgate village in which Marvell had lived."

"Who?" asked Mrs Winter, for Wild's voice had become slightly declamatory. Even Doris attended.

"Marvell—a Restoration poet," Wild elucidated.

"Oh yes. When you mentioned Highgate—— I used to have friends who lived in Highgate."

"What else did he want to see?" asked Ruth.

"He wanted to find if there was an original of the cigar-divan of Prince Florizel of Bohemia in Soho."

"Is there?" asked Ruth, when Wild paused. Really she was less interested, for the moment, in discovering if there was an original for the cigar-divan of Prince Florizel in Soho than in hearing more about the interests of her old friend of the pigeon-loft.

"Oh yes, we found it," said Wild. "I think our evidence was sufficiently unemotionally winnowed. We went down to Greenwich one day, I remember, merely to see the London river of Conrad's tales. We nearly had an altercation on the river steamer,

arguing whether 'Typhoon' or 'Youth' was the greater. Each succeeded in shaking the other's opinion. That means that we were very good friends."

Ruth only trusted herself with a nod.

"I met him one morning, very early, in the Strand," Wild continued. "He told me that he had been informed by an omnibus driver who drove an omnibus from Wimbledon to Putney, Putney to Wimbledon all day long, that Swinburne walked every day from his Putney house to the top of Wimbledon, and back, sun or rain. I accompanied him, by Tube, to Putney, and we climbed to a crossroads. It was raining torrents. We were the only people afoot. We sheltered under a tree at the crossroads. There is a circular seat round the trunk and we were fairly sheltered there. Now and then a motor slid past, round the curve there, purring, in the rain." (Wild paused and murmured, "'Purring' is good.") "I had decided that it was too wet even for Swinburne, when up the hill we saw him coming, old and vigorous. The rain ran off his grey slouch hat; and so erectly did he carry himself that the cascade from his hatbrim behind fell to his heels. No photograph ever showed Swinburne. His photographs make him look almost a weak man. This old man who came up the hill was

like a god. I began to chant 'The Garden of Proserpine,' and Brough told me to shut up. I was slightly annoyed. I felt that Brough could plan a thing of this kind, but he had not sufficient sense of the pageantry of life to carry it out."

Ruth's face was masklike.

"Sitting there," went on Wild, "sitting there under the tree, we watched Swinburne come up, a grand sight, eyes puckered, head up to the lashing rain. We pretended to be looking at the ground under the spreading branches and making designs there with our sticks, but were really, of course, surreptitiously observing him. Now, I believed, and I still do believe, that Swinburne's eye met mine, and that he understood this unostentatious tribute of ours, mine and Brough's. I told Brough so. He would have none of it. He assured me that Swinburne was rejoicing in the rain in his face, and oblivious of us. I told him Swinburne had smiled on me, and he made levity of the suggestion; told me Swinburne (he had it on the word of the omnibus driver) was unapproachable by anybody on his walks, except by the children. I said, 'Well, I am childlike,' and he responded that I was infantile; and we came home soaking wet by the Tube again." Wild considered his memories of John Brough a

moment. “He had no interest in the eighteenth-century men’s houses, except Goldsmith’s. He wanted to see the Tower for the sake of Raleigh, I remember. I remember how, when I suggested that we might go and see Pope’s house at Twickenham, I had to reconstruct my opinion of his breadth of taste. Something very like estrangement was the result. Yes, I had to reconstruct my opinion of him.”

Mapleton Wild paused and laughed—recalling another incident.

“One day I met him in Chancery Lane and commented how Ben Jonson had worked as a bricklayer upon a wall there and laid down his trowel one day to recite Homer. I thought it was a story to appeal to him. I told him how a Benchler, hearing him, plucked him away from bricklaying and sent him to Trinity College. Of course I was aware that the story was not firmly based in history but did not say so. He was inclined to scout it. I said—I flatter myself not without a certain happy terseness of expression—that if it did not actually happen it should have happened. ‘And no bricklayer,’ I said, ‘should recite Homer in vain.’ He replied that a knowledge of Homer was its own reward, became highly excited, or vigorous—yes, I must do

him the justice to say vigorous—in expression. He told me that I was meretricious. Then he became most oddly quiet, speaking low and forcible, in a way he had——”

“I know,” interjected Ruth.

“—told me that romance, to me, was a shimmering fungus on an old wall—to him, the wall. There was another coldness between us after that.”

“You were evidently very great friends,” said Ruth.

“I begin to think we were,” said Wild. “I remember how I met him once in St James’s Street. I had gone there to see about some handkerchiefs—I have them specially made for me—and there he was, looking so bemused and elated all at once that I surmised he had been wining and dining. He came with me into the haberdasher’s and recited Waller’s lyric while the shopman was in some rearward place, between hanging ties and socks and much subdued colour, inquiring if my handkerchiefs were ready. I asked him what Waller’s lyric had to do with him, and he said very indignantly—or perhaps reproachfully, ‘St James’s Street, sir, where Waller read his poem to Sacharissa, where Lord Nelson lodged, where Rochester saw the Restoration ladies buying their perfumes—where Mapleton Wild bought his cambric handkerchiefs with the purple hems.’”

Could anyone resist that ? Brough was irresistible in that vein. That turn of phrase of compliment was worthy of—who shall I say ?—worthy of——” He paused.

“ Of himself,” suggested Ruth.

“ Lord ! I was going to say of me !” Wild ejaculated, and roared like a happy boy.

“ I wonder where he is now,” he said, suddenly sober. “ Incidents such as these,” he continued, almost unctuous (but let me be just to him, as Wild would say, and say “ tender ”), “ incidents such as these between men, I need not tell you, Miss Winter, bring an element of friendship.”

“ Yes.” And Ruth sat looking into the old pigeon-loft of the W. D. & H. offices, as it was before the fire, looking so mournfully that Doris came over beside her and slipped a frog-cold hand into hers.

“ Yes,” said Ruth again, “ it must be a pain to you to know that Mr Brough has disappeared. You were such friends that I should think—— I mean—— Have you no idea of his address now ? ”

“ None at all. He has sold up everything and gone. The man who attended on him while he was laid up has gone too.”

“ What kind of man attended on him ? ” Ruth demanded.

“ A brother of the W. D. & H. elevator-man ; an old soldier, but a very wandering man.”

“ Did he not tell anyone where they were going ? ”

“ No ; not a soul, so far as inquiry has shown. I blame myself. We had a rupture, you must understand, Brough and I.” Wild looked perturbed. “ I blame myself. He might have let me know if—— Well, we had a very bad rupture.” Wild seemed to be unable to express himself. “ If only I had gone into his room that day that I went round raising the subscription for the tan—I mean—raising the—raising A subscription. Oh no, if I remember rightly that was the day I—I heard of his disappearance. It was a day or two before that, on a call at the offices, that I wondered if I should ask for him. I wish I had. If I had done so I would have heard from Blandley, who shared the room, that Brough was ill. If only I had seen him before that——” He paused, and, in a tone that from any other man would have been sententious, he said, “ Ah, the ‘ if onlys ’ of life ! ” Then, “ I’m glad of one thing. I’m glad I have that Toby jug he gave me. You remember it ? You were with him when he made me that gracious tribute to his pleasure in my article on Toby jugs.”

Doris had gone back to Mrs Winter to inquire

where she had got her brooch—then to ask to see her watch.

“ I may tell you the history of that now,” said Ruth. “ He wanted it for himself.”

“ What ! ”

“ I mean we both wanted it. He paid two guineas for it.”

“ But——”

“ He wanted a snuffbox, and the snuffbox was two guineas and he had only a guinea. Then I wanted a cameo brooch ; and it was two guineas and I had only a guinea. Well—well, we—he bought the Toby jug. We were to settle afterwards who was to keep it.” Ruth floundered.

Wild came to her rescue.

“ Did he ever repay the guinea you lent him ? ”

“ No.”

Wild leapt up, and, raising his head, laughed, and rolled from the room.

He returned to a very calm and collected Ruth, carrying the delightful Toby jug and set it on the white mantelpiece—that laughing blob of yellow, purple, red, black and cream.

“ There it is,” he said, standing back, head on side, admiring it.

“ I never paid him the guinea either,” said Ruth, in an exceedingly small voice.

“ It seems to me that neither of you gave the jug to me,” said Wild gaily. “ The whole incident is a record of impulses.” He lifted the Toby jug from the mantelpiece. “ A glorious impulse makes me offer it to you.”

“ Oh, I couldn’t,” she began.

“ You take it,” said he.

CHAPTER XXIV : MOTHER LOVE

RUTH was very quiet on the homeward way, carrying her Toby jug. So was Mrs Winter. Mrs Winter was pensively regarding what might be mere castles built in air by a doting mother of forty-five, or prophecies.

That man Wild, Mrs Winter reflected, was a very delightful man. He had a very nice house. In it there were many objects of value. It seemed sad for that dear little girl of his to be motherless. How fond she seemed of Ruth. Yes—Doris was decidedly attached to Ruth, and Mr Wild had noticed that attraction. Mrs Winter had observed his expression when Doris ran to Ruth, while he and Ruth were talking of that editor who had disappeared. It was a very tender glance that he had given.

“Mr Wild wears his hair very long for a man,” said Mrs Winter.

“Yes,” said Ruth.

Perhaps long hair, Mrs Winter reflected, was not a trifle ridiculous. The miniatures of her grandfather showed that men certainly had worn hair long since Samson’s day. But that taby jug, trilby jug——

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“What is the name of that?” Mrs Winter asked, inclining her head toward the Toby jug in Ruth’s hand.

“This? A Toby jug.”

“Oh yes. Toby jug.”

It was a very nice gift. Strange that Ruth had not mentioned purchasing it. Odd—that purchase!

“I notice Mr Wild is not using his monoele,” said Mrs Winter. “His eye is perhaps better. Some form of astigmatism, I expect.”

Ruth laughed.

“He only wore a monocle because of Jimmy Whistler,” she said.

“An oculist?” asked Mrs Winter. “It seems a familiar way to speak of an oculist.”

“No; an artist—Whistler, the artist.”

“But why did he ever use a monocle because of an artist? He might have injured his vision permanently.”

“I presume,” said Ruth, “that it was a kind of hero-worship—a tribute. Whistler wore one.”

“How very curious! And has he now quarrelled with this artist—Mr James Whistler?”

“I think perhaps he is only growing old,” said Ruth.

“Oh, rubbish! He is a man in his prime. He

seems," continued Mrs Winter, "to be very communicative to you. Did he tell you this curious story about his eyesight—if I can call it so—to-day?"

"Yes; while we were looking at a portrait of Whistler. Did you not notice it, that print he had lying on his desk?"

"Dear me!" said Mrs Winter. "How very odd! Now—from the distance—I saw you were smiling over it and jumped to the conclusion that Doris had spilled the ink over something slightly valuable, and that it had amused Mr Wild. I'm glad I did not say anything. Not that I would pretend to understand what I don't understand, but so that my daughter may not have her mother looked upon as a foolish person before her."

Ruth squeezed her mother's forearm.

Mrs Winter continued: "You know I never pretend to understand art, dear; only artists can understand art. I remember once saying something to an artist about some frames I had seen, made of wood, then gummed, then rice thrown on them, then the rice that stuck painted with gold paint. He was a very courteous man. He said that it must be a charming combination—but I do see things, you know, dear. From a momentary look of horror in his eye I felt that I had made a blunder. Only

artists should talk about art. And yet I don't know. Literary people can look over their shoulders, as it were, and put in a word now and then. A literary man can't understand so well perhaps ; but he can express himself better perhaps, and he has a sort of sympathy for artists. Sometimes authors even try to draw a little themselves. Now—Thackeray's drawings—I like them very much—and he was a literary man. Let me see now—Whistler—Whistler. Did he once paint a picture of his mother all in profile ? My brother Sam, when he left his library post, sent me a present—a picture of an elderly lady, as I thought, sitting knitting. It seems she was not knitting. I thought to be gracious in my appreciation and refrained from mentioning that I thought that she was sitting very close to a wall in a most unusual way ; I thanked him for the picture of the dear old lady sitting knitting and he wrote back to me, ' My dear Amelia, I am sorry to disabuse your mind. She is not knitting. She is merely being immortal ! ' I confess that a little devil in me made me wish I had said all I thought of the picture instead of refraining——”

Ruth laughed outright.

“ Merely being immortal ! ” said Mrs Winter.
“ Oh, well, it's a long time ago.”

“ ‘Merely being immortal !’ Mr Brough might have said that,” said Ruth.

“ Ah ! That reminds me. I want to hear about this Mr Brough.”

“ I’m afraid there’s nothing to tell,” said Ruth.

“ But, my dear child, that was a strange story I heard you telling Mr Wild when you were standing at the mantelpiece with him. Did you often go out shopping with this Mr Brough in London ? ”

Ruth laughed at the “ shopping ” ; but it was a plaintive little laugh. “ That was the only time I met him out of the office.” Ruth looked into distance, talking as if to herself.

“ Oh—the only time ! ”

It had been purely accidental. Odd ! very odd—the way that Mr Wild had given Ruth this tabbie jug was odd.

“ Talmic jug, you said ? ”

“ Toby.”

“ Oh yes, Toby.”

The most noteworthy part of all the talk at Wild’s house, Mrs Winter considered, as they walked on, had been when he let slip about having been, evidently, the prime mover in sending that charming gift of tan to strew before the Maida Vale house. Curious how he caught himself up after having let

that fact slip out. He came from the north country. There was a proverb about north-country men. What was it? Oh yes—"Poor courter, good husband," or something like that. She wondered how long his wife had been dead. Poor little Doris! A girl brought up by a man came by so many fantastic ideas.

Presently she spoke again :

"Well, Ruth, now that you are at home working, doing your articles on fashion and so forth, I may say that I think it better than being in an office. It is a little more dignified. It is all very wonderful to me, for when you were a little girl at school you never could tolerate grammar."

"I remember. I used to think it such an ugly word!" And Ruth laughed. "I loved history and geography. Now—is not 'grammar' an ugly word?"

"I can't understand, my child." She thought it over. "No, I can't understand. I suppose you must be a clever woman. Indeed you are. But your reason for disliking grammar seems as odd to me as Mr Wild's reason for discarding his monocle."

"Oh no, for wearing it, mother."

"Well—perhaps that is what I mean. I wonder what Mr Wild styles himself to the income-tax collector."

“ I’ve no idea,” said Ruth.

“ Your father used to put ‘retired,’ ” said Mrs Winter.

Mapleton Wild, having walked to the gate with his guests, turned back, Doris clinging to his sleeve, and entered his brown-papered hall. Doris danced away to eat an *éclair* that, she had noted, had been left over.

Wild, in the hall, less considered, than was impressed by, just a something in the way that Mrs Winter had shaken hands with him on departing. He scratched the top of his auburn nimbus with his second finger, gave a little chuckling laugh and said : “ It was damned funny.”

“ What,” asked Doris, with cream from the *éclair* all round her mouth so that her lips looked like a strawberry, “ was dam funny ? ”

“ Never you mind,” he said, and went upstairs to put a shilling in the self-imposed penalty-box. Every time that Doris heard him swear he put a shilling in the box ; but, as he was not a mercenary man, the box was no remedy. And he had no idea what to do with the money when the box should be full.

Presently he came downstairs again, passed into his study, and began to make order out of its confusion.

He had taken this book and that book out of the shelves to show to Ruth Winter while Doris had been loading Mrs Winter with "At the Back of the North Wind," illustrated by Hughes; "John Gilpin," illustrated by Caldecott, and many other treasured volumes that were now stacked upon the floor. One book lay open at a page which said "A is for Archery," and showed an early Victorian lady who had fired an arrow. The bow was still held forth; the right hand had just released the string and sped the arrow and not yet dropped.

Doris came dancing in.

"I've eaten the *éclair* that was left over," she said.

"I know," said her father.

"How do you know?" she asked.

He was about to tell her that he had seen the cream on her cheeks when they met last in the hall, but bethought him that if he did she would catechise him about what had been dam funny. He merely wagged his head in a way she understood.

"Father," she said, "if that lady was in white instead of black she would be like Aunty Winter."

"What lady? Oh yes—I see. Yes—so she would. Oh!" he ejaculated.

"What is it?" Doris inquired.

"An idea," said Wild.

“ Oh, bother ! I’ll have to leave you then, shall I ? ”

“ No, no ! ” and he laughed. “ It’s not that kind of idea.”

He had suddenly remembered a little figure of porcelain that had stood on a polished table in the flat of the departed Brough.

“ Not a bit like Ettie Wilson,” he considered ; “ really much more like Ruth Winter. How blind some men are ! Amazing to think that Brough, who admired that porcelain figure——” But perhaps there is no need to follow the course of Wild’s thoughts. It landed him in another maze.

After his task of tidying was over he returned to the question of Brough and the porcelain lady.

“ No man,” he had once mused, looking at that porcelain figure with the sweeping skirts, “ could consider it a bit like Ettie Wilson,” and he had quoted a tag of Schopenhauer to himself over the blindness of Brough.

Now he decided that—perhaps—Brough had not been at all blinded and that—perhaps—Brough had had eyes to see the resemblance.

Cumulative evidence came flooding upon him in his tidied study.

He recalled the scene at the Five Bells when the W. D. & H. picnicked there. Pooh ! Of

course ! Brough sat at a table away from Ruth because he was an ultra-chivalrous person. At a picnic or dinner a wise onlooker might rely upon it that the woman he offered his arm to, or to whom he passed tea, was nothing to Brough.

Mapleton Wild sat clutching his chin and looking at the pattern in his carpet, that rich carpet that had reminded Brough, long ago, of moorland turf. Very speedily now he considered a great number of items. He considered how Ruth had begun to tell a long story of how she and Brough had bought that Toby jug, and then had become, it seemed, almost nervous. Wild had gone away to bring the Toby jug for her reinspection then.

At the time he had thought that her recent bout of rheumatic fever must be the cause of that downfall of what had seemed to be going to be a long interesting narration of a charming episode ; she had been fidgety ; and after beginning with interest, she had ended with what seemed like disaffection, lamely. He recalled how she, the calm, collected Ruth Winter, had switched the electric light on and off when her story became incoherent.

“ My God ! ” he said. “ And when I wrote him that letter I thought it was Ettie Wilson for whom he pronounced that sonorous and splendid love

lyric, interrupting my reading of my elegant article upon a Great Soldier. Yes, I flatter myself that that article, although lost in the files of *The Daily Paper*, will one day—— Ah, well, if I was a fool about that visit of his, at anyrate I have given Ruth Winter the Toby jug. The incident of the purchase certainly appealed to her.” He considered again. “Oh, absurd ! Absurd ! It is impossible ! I can’t have made such an ass of myself as to write to Brough about the wrong woman—a man of my intuitive powers—my——”

Doris popped her head in.

“Have you not got down even the skelinton of your idea yet, dad ?”

“You can come in,” said he. “The idea is too involved and distressing. It doesn’t bear consideration.”

“I don’t understand,” said Doris. “You are too—I forget—abstuse, I think I heard you say once.”

“When did I say—what did I say was too abstruse ?”

“When Mr Kinnaird was telling you why he had spoiled the rose-tree,” she explained.

Perhaps I need not explain that Mr Kinnaird was the consulting gardener.

CHAPTER XXV : SIMPLE HUMAN EMOTIONS

NELLIE was in tears in the kitchen and Ruth trying to comfort her.

Nellie explained in response to the usual "Dear me, Nellie, what's wrong?" :

"I've chucked my young man, miss; and I loved him very dearly, miss."

"Then why did you—chuck him?"

"'E was late to see me last Thursday. And so I chucked him. And I did like 'im."

"Oh, you'll make it up," said Ruth.

"I don't know that I want to. Since we came here I've had the grocer's young man what calls for orders lifting his hat to me—just like a gentleman. The other one what I've chucked he was always putting off and putting off our marriage, and I do so want to have something to love."

Ruth knew not how to console. She looked merely distressed.

"I want to get married and 'ave a baby," said Nellie. "You see I never had a home. My mother drank and my father was always brooding, and if I

had a baby of my own' I could teach it to love me. I would have something then to love me proper. Oh, there's the bell ! ”

Nellie dashed to the towel that depended from a roller on the pantry door, mopped her eyes, saw that her cap was on straight by looking at herself quickly in the largest electro-plated cover hanging on the wall and departed in answer to the summons.

“ These simple human emotions baffle me,” said Ruth, looking at herself in the large cover on the wall ; and she was amazed, seeing how grotesquely her face was rendered, that Nellie should use that for seeing to the straightness of her cap instead of the little mirror that was propped up beside the sink.

Nellie returned and announced : “ Miss Wilson to see you, miss ; and she says it is important ; so I have put her in your den.”

The rheumatic fever had left its sequelæ upon Ruth. She felt her breath catch.

What had Ettie Wilson come for ? Had she, possibly, come to ask Ruth if she knew anything about John Brough's movements ? Ettie had never been a visitor.

“ You're all of a flutter, miss,” said Nellie.

“ Yes. I must not be,” said Ruth. “ I'm afraid

my heart has never been quite right since——” And she departed.

“ Shall I bring in tea ? ” asked Nellie.

“ Yes, just at the usual time,” said Ruth ; and then sailed away to interview the caller, wholly controlled now, little thinking that Ettie, in the “ den,” was striving for a similar debonair attitude.

CHAPTER XXVI: A LOVE-LETTER

ETTIE sat very erect, arm extended, holding her walking-stick. Then came a feeling of flurry. She thought her pose looked too mistressful. She sat back and folded her hands on her lap ; but, sitting so, she found that she held the walking-cane as if it were a riding-crop. She became flustered again. If this sort of thing went on, she considered, she would forget how she had planned to begin. She looked at the white-painted door in horror, expecting it to open any minute.

When it did open, and Ruth entered, Ettie was twisting her veil under her chin, twisting frantically with nervous thumb and forefinger. Ettie had come here for Ruth's sake and yet was more critical of her own appearance than she had ever been, anywhere, in all her life. She had just been trying to stop fidgeting with her veil, telling herself, one moment, that she looked the sort of apparition with which dentists must be familiar, and, the next, reflecting warmly that if going through ordeals like this were

essential to being good she had rather be bad—when the door opened.

She leapt up, in the event, and rushed at Ruth, saying :

“ Oh, my dear, I don’t know where to begin. I’ve been very, very bad. I’ve treated you horribly. No, I won’t sit down. No, listen to me. Oh, you don’t look well. I’ve treated you horribly. Sit down, do, please. Yes, I’ll sit down—so that you may sit down. Oh, I’ve been—— Read this ! ” She fumbled in her pocket but could not find what she wanted. “ Oh, don’t say I’ve lost it ! ”

Ruth said : “ You’ve excited yourself about something. It will be all right. Don’t trouble. I’m sure it’s not so bad as—— ”

“ It’s awful ! ” cried Ettie. “ And when I see you here, and looking so—— I mean I can see you’ve been ill—— I mean you’re looking really awfully well, don’t you know?—better than I would have—— Oh, here it is. I ”—she held a letter in her hand—“ I must tell you. It really was addressed to me—I opened it—I wish I had not destroyed the envelope—it really was addressed to me—I opened it—I read it—I didn’t send it on—I—— ”

Ruth held out a hand and took the proffered letter and read :

“DEAR MISS WINTER,—While I was in the offices, under the same roof with you, I did not allow myself to acknowledge to myself all that I feel for you. But now, when I am getting better, and should soon be able to be out again, I can’t keep mute any more.

“I know so much better now what you mean to me that I hesitate to use the word ‘love,’ and yet I must in some way convey to you my feeling. I have a great speech that I could make you. It is not the kind of speech I could write. A man may write to a woman, in certain circumstances, a certain amount of his thoughts ; but some things he would fain say to her. I only write at all because I am sure that if I come back to the offices I shall be unable to hide myself ; and I know you well enough to know that you are a woman who would be cut up if a man loved you and you had to turn him down. To bore you is the last thing in the world that I desire.

“If it does not irritate you to hear the above, would you kindly write me thus : ‘ Dear Mr Brough, —You need not stay away. My job in the offices will not be rendered a bore ’ ?

“If you think you even feel a little happy at the news, would you please write to me as ‘ Dear John ’ ?

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“ If you feel that I am only boring you, write :
‘ Dear Sir,—It is no use.’

“ I think this plan is the best to make it all quite simple and easy for you. In the event of a ‘ Dear Sir ’ letter I shall not come back to the offices. You need not worry at all about me. I have dropped enough about my former life for you to know that Fleet Street is not the world’s centre for me. The world is wide. I shall love you always.

“ If you should at any time want a friend, write to James Paton, or call upon him, at Paton & Davis, Furniture Dealers, Tottenham Court Road. I shall keep him posted up on my whereabouts, and no matter where I am I would come to wherever you are if you had need of a friend—quite apart from any love-making proposition. If you should ever want to write to me, a letter addressed care of Mr Paton, to be forwarded, will find me. Believe me, yours,

“ JOHN BROUGH.”

This communication Ruth read—and read again, for she could not grasp it all upon the first perusal.

She read it a third time, while Ettie sat rigid and holding breath, and the little white marble clock ticked.

“ It came addressed to me,” said Ettie, when Ruth had finished the third reading.

“ Addressed to you ? ” said Ruth, looking round at Ettie as if she had forgotten her existence.

“ Yes. Oh, there was another letter also, addressed to you. He had evidently put them in the wrong envelopes.”

“ Have you the other one, the one that came addressed to me ? ”

“ I—oh, don’t you see ?—I opened that one first ”—she pointed to the letter in Ruth’s hand—“ it was addressed to me. And then I saw an envelope in his handwriting addressed to you, so I knew that that would be the one containing the letter really meant for me. I opened it also.”

“ You opened it.”

“ Yes. I wish I had kept it ; for you may not feel that you can believe me.”

“ Oh yes, I believe you,” and Ruth folded up the letter and held it with both hands.

“ It was nothing at all,” said Ettie, “ the other one. It was just to say he was getting better and wanted to thank me for having gone up with him when he was burnt—to his flat. You may have heard.”

Ruth was looking into nothingness, or so she appeared to be looking.

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Ettie sobbed a great sob and threw herself down on her knees before Ruth.

“If you were fond of him I may have wrecked your life,” she sobbed.

Ruth drew back her chair and held the note behind her back. It had been in the wrong hands for long, but it was in her hands now, and she held it behind her back, not knowing what she did.

Ettie rose, the better for her breakdown.

“Ruth—Ruth—I used to call you Ruth when we were at school—say you forgive me. I should feel always terrible if you didn’t say you forgave me.”

Then suddenly, ever so suddenly, as the light must have come on the face of the waters when God said, “Let there be light,” Ruth jumped up and said, in the sweetest tones :

“Of course I forgive. Really, I don’t know why you worry so much. There’s really no need for it. It was sweet of you to come down with it ; you might just have sent it on by post, with a note to say that you had opened it in error and then——”

“I couldn’t do that. I was afraid it might kill you. I was jealous.” Ruth, hearing this, opened her eyes so that the white showed all round for a moment. “I was jealous that no man thought as much of me. That’s why I kept the letter. And it

seemed a kind of charm, too. It wasn't written to me but—— Oh, if one is going to love at all, instead of just have fun, that's—that's love."

The door opened. It was four o'clock, the W. D. & H. tea hour, which Ruth had made her tea hour. Nellie entered with teapot and tinkling cups, set the tray down, poured out two cupfuls, and drifted away.

"Will you have a cup of tea?" said Ruth, and took up a cup to hand to Ettie.

The little clock on the mantel struck speedily and silverly four times—and Ruth saw the W. D. & H. offices, scented the boiled office tea; saw the stairs that led up to the attics, the ladder that led up to the pigeon-loft; saw Brough sitting on the corn-chest. A tear fell and splashed in the tea and she did not notice that it had done so. Ettie did. But Ettie, most finical of females, said not a word, took the cup with fingers that made it keep on tinkling in her hand till she had, in a frenzy, to snatch the teaspoon out of the saucer.

Ruth had lifted the other cup subconsciously.

She saw Brough in the pigeon-loft. She heard him speaking: "When I was a boy in Hastings I kept pigeons."

She had never referred to having been in Hastings

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too. Why ? Because she did not want to “ make links ” between herself and John Brough. She knew some girls would have jumped at that word and said : “ Oh, I was a little girl in Hastings.”

She heard his voice again : “ If ever I was absolutely beaten in London I would head for——” Where ? Where was it ? Where was it ? “ In the Dry Belt.” She remembered that. Why had the name of the place gone from her memory ?

She turned to Ettie.

“ Will you have some more tea, another cup ? They’re very small.”

Ettie held up her empty cup ; but it fell from her fingers.

“ And I’ve broken a cup now ! ” she cried, and burst into tears.

“ Don’t cry or you’ll make me cry too,” said Ruth. “ Don’t cry, Miss Wilson—Ettie ! ”

Ettie looked up.

“ You’ve forgiven me ! ” she blubbered.

“ Yes ; but I want to tell you, so that you may know that John Brough would have——”

What she wanted to tell was left untold.

“ Aunty Winter ! Aunty Winter ! ” a voice hailed, and Ruth, with one word, “ Brat,” ran to the door and turned the key in the lock.

“Everybody loved Mr Brough,” said Ettie, when Ruth very sedately returned to her seat ; “and he loved you.” Ettie rose. “I’m going away now. I must go. But you do forgive me ? ”

“Yes, I forgive you ; but I can’t see why you kept it.”

“Because I hated you—I don’t now—and I didn’t see why you should have a man look on you that way ; you had a man love you so well that he would go to the other end of the world if you couldn’t stand him. I can only get men to love me so much that they want ”—and then she sat down again, abruptly, and cried afresh—“to squeeze my hand !” she wailed.

And Ruth comforted her and then sent her home.

CHAPTER XXVII: EXIT ETTIE

ETTIE, thereafter, hated Ruth no more.

But she who had, at eighteen, taken her hat off in the grocer's shop in Hastings and put it carefully on again, looking at herself partly in the mirror behind the assistant, partly in the assistant's eyes, ended by sitting in the smoking-room of the Lady Scriveners' Club with a little circle of admirers around her, explaining herself to them, explaining various matters, such, for example, as that she was bored by her father: "He is so painfully easily hoodwinked. He takes all the pleasure out of hoodwinking him." Such speeches did she give off, and wait for the acclamation—which she always received, because she carried with her her own retinue, a kind of *claquerie* of "guests," young men who wished to be daring, girls who thought Ettie was "smart," and pictured her as the heroine of her tales. Here was the woman who caused men to pant, to choke, to froth at the mouth, to chase ladies to their bedrooms and weep outside the door imagining that the sound of the door-handle clicking was the sound of the

key being turned—and they too simple to try the door-handle to make sure ; thus tickling a large public, and yet keeping the story “ quite moral.”

If you ask how on earth she ever gained entrance to the Lady Scriveners’ Club—the explanation is that if the members had black-balled her she might have said they were afraid of her. Besides—she was successful—“ don’t you know ? ” as she would say.

So they let her in and then talked to her without expression, cold of feature and of voice. If she detained anyone there came the inevitable phrase : “ How interestin’.” Then an abrupt rustling rising to depart with a gleam of teeth and : “ So sorry I must go.”

Ettie saw it all ; but what cared she ! She put on her most expensive clothes when she intended to visit the club ; and she arranged for friends to meet her there. I do not think she was very happy—but she managed to extract a certain amount of titillation out of it all.

She hated Mapleton Wild, not, perhaps it is needless to say, because of the affair at the restaurant, but because of a review he wrote of her novel, “ When The Chaperon Slept.” “ It may be,” he wrote, “ that in art there is neither morality nor immorality.

Without entering the lists in that controversy, I can safely say that 'When The Chaperon Slept' is slightly immoral."

When Ettie read that the first time she thought it would help the sales. When she read it again she perceived what Wild meant and consoled herself by remembering how she had crushed him at the *bourgeoisie* restaurant. He had not even been a flame, she considered ; he had been but a void beneath the extinguisher. Sufficient time had elapsed since the extinguishing incident to permit of her holding that view.

When she married Blandley (as marry him she did eventually) she refused to wear her engagement ring on her left hand. She could not refuse the ring. It humoured him, the silly fellow, to give it to her, and, besides, it was a ring of price. She explained to Blandley that on that hand it was a sign of bondage. His view of woman advised humouring. So he did humour her.

When, a year after their marriage, he saw one day that she had put her wedding ring upon the third finger of the left hand, the finger on which wedding rings were always worn before the age of emancipation, his eyes were moist—though it must be admitted that they showed moist over touching scenes very

easily now—for he had weakened the lachrymatory valves with much tippling. Ettie explained that she was going to lunch at a house where there was to be present a most interestin' man, a man who had a name for flirting only with married women, and she could not bear to miss the amusement of ensnaring him.

“ Ensnaring him ! ” cried Blandley.

“ To bring about his downfall ! ” she cried, and waved her left hand in air and posed before her husband, sweeping her black train round her with the right so that the contour of her hips and lithe legs showed. She looked like an intoxicated mermaid balanced for a moment upon the tail-fins.

Brough, even in the early days at the W. D. & H. offices, had seen the possibility of such a development. Mapleton Wild had not. Wild merely “ felt ” that she was not the woman for Brough, and was rude to her—and had his reward !

A man told me the other day that he had heard someone talking with Ettie of the old W. D. & H. days.

“ Mapleton Wild used to write for the W. D. & H. about that time, did he not ? ”

“ Mapleton Wild is a very bombastic man,” she said ; “ and oh—so susceptible ! ”

"A madman, Brough, was editor of one of their papers then, was he not?" came another comment.

"You must not call John Brough a madman," Ettie said; "please don't, or I shall really cry. I'm sure I don't know what he came into the world for, nor why, having come to the world, he went into Fleet Street. Some people called him mad. I flatter myself that I used to be able to look upon him as the only sane soul in the whole rookery."

"Another old flame of yours?" with a giggle.

"No; he had a way of making flames look very pallid, like candles in sunshine." Then she recovered herself. "To remember Brough in crucial periods of rather extravagant amours gave one the capacity to remain unapproachable in the great kennel of the Smart World into which Fate has led me. I think John Brough suggested to me my novel, 'The Pursuit of the Virgin.' You see—it was the thought of a really good man constantly in the back of the heroine's mind that kept her safe, and"—Ettie's strange smile flickered on her lips—"made the book worth citing from the advertising pulpits of England."

Her *vis-à-vis* drew back in admiration and terror, with "You are a very dangerous and clever woman."

“Bring me some more coffee—and do get a knowing waiter to put a cinder in it,” she said.

“A cinder?”

“Oh, how very naïve you are! And you call yourself a man of the world! A brandy liqueur in it. You simple men do persist in calling a spade a spade. Nothing in life has any tang if you give it its own name. I always speak of my love affairs as amours. There! There!” She felt she had not the gift at all; she could shock, but not scintillate. “Bring me a coffee, with a brandy liqueur in it then—stark naked and uninteresting, coffee and a brandy liqueur, please.”

CHAPTER XXVIII: DEUS EX MACHINÂ

THE day after the tea-party at Rus in Urbe Wild was too busy to go to the city. But upon the day following he ran his right forearm lightly round his silk hat, picked two threads from his coat, took up the staff of Barbey D'Aurevilly, kissed Doris, promised to be home to tea and departed upon a Great Quest. At Charing Cross he walked into the voided space before the station, and caused a porter there to shake his head doubtfully. For Mr Wild behaved strangely.

The porter, when Wild appeared, saluted him with "Taxi ?"

Wild nodded as if meaning "yes," then countermanded the nod with a vigorously spoken "No." This because the colour of the taxi toward which the porter gave one step at Wild's nod did not please him. He stood there gloomy, wrapped in mystery, while one taxi after another swept into the yard, disgorged its fare, and swept out. Thus came and went brown taxis, buff taxis, salmon-coloured ones. A yellow one brought him sufficiently out of his

apparent lethargy to cause the porter to step a little closer to him again, but Wild allowed the yellow one to go also. The next one to enter was of a deep blue that hinted at possible purple when reflected light smote it. Wild nodded to the porter.

“I’ll have this one,” he said. The Great Quest upon which he was bound had to do with Mr Brough ; and Wild felt that, to ensure success, it should be undertaken in a manner worthy of Brough.

Thus was the porter puzzled, having no comprehension of those simple human emotions that influenced Mapleton Wild. His was a colourless life. Wild tipped him a silver sixpence for the mere opening of the door, or rather the holding of it open after its occupants had alighted.

To the chauffeur said this remarkable fare : “I want to be driven to as many second-hand furniture shops as possible, or, rather, let me put it another way—I wish to be driven to a second-hand furniture shop. If it should happen not to be the one of which I am in search I shall have to be driven to another ; and so on. At the same time, luck may be with me, and against you : the first shop may be the one that I want to find. In that case, of course, the journey will be over.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” the chauffeur said.

Wild began to repeat himself to the best of his ability. The chauffeur smiled very sweetly when Wild was half-way through the repetition, and, "I understand, sir," he said.

Wild entered the cab, the chauffeur winked to the porter, the porter winked in response. The taxi departed.

Shop after shop they visited, shop after shop did Wild stroll through with a kind of watchful impassivity, till they came at length, about noon, to Tottenham Court Road, where Wild paid up, gave the chauffeur two-and-sixpence with which to have lunch, bade him be back in three-quarters of an hour, when they would again go upon the Quest, and retreated into a little restaurant to oxtail soup, whitebait, well-beaten chump-chop, baked potatoes, Camembert cheese, and half-a-bottle of *Vieux* something-or-other. Then again into the blue motor and up Tottenham Court Road. He visited every second-hand furniture shop there, hopeless and hopeful, looking for any piece of furniture that he could identify as once having graced the flat of John Brough. So far the chauffeur had been the one to select neighbourhoods, had exercised his own initiative; but some faint shadow of sadness in Wild's eyes must have been observed by him, I think,

when Wild came out of the last Tottenham Court Road shop ; and instead of being spurred to fresh endeavours thereby the chauffeur was depressed. The chauffeur asked for guidance.

“ Shall I go east, along Euston Road, or west, sir ? ” he said.

“ In which direction,” asked Wild, “ are there more furniture shops ? Can you remember ? ”

“ It’s a toss up, I think.”

“ Then,” said Wild, “ in the words of the great Horace Greeley ”—and lightly did he wave the cane of Barbey D’Aurevilly—“ ‘ go west, young man ; go west.’ ”

But his gaiety was assumed.

He sat back in the motor again, so dejected that when it stopped he did not notice that there was no block ahead, did not notice that yet again the blue motor had disentangled itself from the traffic and glided to a standstill before yet another old furniture shop. Seven-eighths of him were hopeless when Wild entered this one. Here he discarded the rôle of furniture diviner, and, a mere lost human being, disclosed his heart to an elderly gentleman in a slightly shabby frock-coat suit, but wearing two fobs and an ancient ring as though he followed his calling with love, instead of avarice.

"I am in trouble," said Wild, sitting down upon a coffin stool.

"It is a condition common to humanity," said the shopkeeper.

Wild looked at him with interest.

"I think I'd better unburden my heart," he said, cocked up his head and shot a melancholy, yet twinkling, glance at the dealer in old furniture.

"It sometimes gives ease to do so," was the reply, "even though the one to whom you disburden is unable to lighten the burden."

"You are something of a philosopher," said Wild. "You will understand me when I explain that a very dear friend of mine has suddenly disappeared. He had in his apartments a collection of old furniture. It has struck me that one way in which he might be traced would be to find the furniture. Dear me! That sounds rather obvious. My idea is that the furniture dealer might be able to shed some light upon his whereabouts."

Mapleton Wild looked again more keenly at his furniture dealer and, observing that he was also being sharply scrutinised, he said: "It is perhaps unnecessary for me to say that I do not come from Scotland Yard."

The furniture dealer merely smiled.

“ There is a chance that you may know my name—it is Mapleton Wild.”

“ Pardon me a moment,” and the furniture dealer passed to his desk, where he began to rummage while Mapleton Wild sat with his fingers locked over the ivory head of Barbey D’Aurevilly’s cane, his chin resting upon the knuckles. The shabby shopman returned with a newspaper cutting, which he held forth. It was headed, “ On Toby Jugs, by Mapleton Wild.”

“ Is that you ? ” he asked.

“ That’s me,” said Wild. “ Do you like this paper ? ”

“ I like it very much indeed,” said the furniture dealer, “ and it gives me a certain pleasure, sir, to think that the writer of it is here in my shop sitting upon that coffin stool.”

Mapleton Wild rose abruptly.

“ A what, sir ? ” he said. “ I thought it was a music stool.”

“ Oh,” explained the furniture dealer, “ they are used by the dilettanti as music stools.”

Wild considered the stool.

“ Are they aware of their original use ? ” he asked.

“ I expect so,” said the furniture dealer, a little puzzled.

“Then,” said Wild, “they must only play, ceaselessly, the ‘*Marche Funèbre*,’ or else they are unimaginative suburbanites.” He suddenly recollected himself. “Pray do not think that I quite mean that, sir,” he said ; “in recent days I have begun to know myself better and I fear that I have a tendency to epigram in place of exactitude.” Mapleton Wild remembered the reason of his being here, and his eyes roamed round the shop.

“I see none of my friend’s furniture,” he said.

“The pleasure of your visit has then all been mine,” said the furniture dealer. He began to fold up the newspaper cutting relative to Toby jugs. “I always get *The Daily Paper* simply to look for your articles. There was a time in my life when I used to look at little else but the *Exchange and Mart* and *The Financial World*, rather disgusted with all our party politics, for I am an old man. I remember the time when the great tradition in politics had not passed, when men, instead of menials, guided instead of gulled their country.”

He took out his pocket-book and put the cutting therein.

“I shall keep this here now,” he said, in an aside to himself. “Yes,” and he clapped the pocket-book, “I had an argument with a friend of mine one day

—a very dear friend. I had been maligning the daily press, and he agreed with me that the great bulk of so-called news was very poor mental pabulum, but he seemed to hold a thought in reserve—he was an interesting man.”

Wild began to be bored, seeing Brough’s furniture no nearer to him.

“He came to me one day,” continued the dealer, “with this article, and one or two others cut from daily papers, and I admitted that the papers contained sometimes matters of merit. He is a very interesting man, and I think he had a most catholic taste. He has sat in my old shop in Tottenham Court Road discussing by the hour with me, what made life of value ; and I came to see, with him, that it was poetry. Nothing has lived without it. We used to sit for hours discussing the matter.”

“Not very good for business,” said Wild, to test the strength of the furniture dealer’s devotion.

“No, indeed ; that is why you find me off Euston Road who once was in a large emporium in Tottenham Court Road.”

“You regret ?” asked Wild.

“I do not regret. My partner, finding how I was going, encouraged me, took over the reins of the business more, and eventually absconded.”

This he spoke so deliberately that the bad boy in Wild roared with delight.

In the lull that followed, Wild glanced at his watch, found that the afternoon was far advanced, and considered that he had promised Doris to be home by tea-time.

“ I am no nearer to Brough,” he meditated, “ but I have had an interesting day ; and I have met a character.” In his finest manner he said : “ I hope you will allow me to call again and have a chat.”

“ Any time you care. I have a great deal of bric-à-brac, more than meets the eye. Come any time you wish, Mr Wild, and you can turn it all over. If it should inspire you to one of these essays which, as my friend used to say, are of infinitely more value than information, I shall be only too delighted.”

“ This walking-stick I carry,” said Wild, “ it is—eh—I cherish the illusion—not inquiring too deeply—it was—eh—on the word of a dealer of the Quai Voltaire in Paris, once the property of Barbey D’Aurevilly.”

“ Who was he, sir ? ”

“ A celebrated dandy.”

“ Dandy ? Dandy ? Well, to be sure, Disraeli was a dandy. But on the whole I am sceptical of dandies.”

“ They are artists whose canvas is themselves,” said Wild.

“ And so they die at death,” said the dealer.

“ Precisely,” said Wild. “ And what is the best of so-called Immortality but a lingering decline ? ”

He hated having to express such an atrophying thought, for it boomeranged back and hit him, and he bowed his head as if asking pardon of Eternity for having sacrificed Hope on the altar of Dialectics.

The furniture dealer shook his head.

“ You are more brilliant, sir, and less believing, than the gentleman who introduced me to your work.”

And Mr Wild did not ask the name of that gentleman ; he was too sore.

He expressed pleasure at the meeting, assured the furniture dealer that he had had a most enjoyable encounter ; and then, to show that he felt the sense of equality here, he presented his card. The furniture dealer presented his.

Mr Wild returned to the blue motor, said “ Charing Cross Station,” and returned thither feeling as if he had been near his goal but had failed to find it.

“ My intuition,” he said, leaning back in the railway carriage, “ tells me that I was near. To-morrow I am busy, and the day after ; but I must try again. I

think I shall try a yellow motor next time. There is a certain fineness of perception about yellow. Lafcadio Hearn, I remember, always wrote on yellow paper," and he toyed with the little gift for Doris which he had purchased, subconsciously, from a hawker at the station entrance, a little toy—a monkey on a stick.

He lay back in a new arrangement of listlessness and laid the blame of his weariness on the *Vieux* something-or-other.

At the junction he alighted and saw nobody on the platform, strolled, lost in thought, to the very end, out beyond the overhanging roof, toying with Barbey D'Aurevilly's cane—that is, if it was Barbey D'Aurevilly's—the monkey on the stick peeping out of the tail pocket of his coat.

He strolled back again, and noticed that the next train was beside the platform now; he entered an empty carriage. As he sat down, something prodded him in the small of the back, and he recovered his equilibrium with a lurching movement, ejaculated "Oh," and drew forth the monkey toy gingerly. It was unhurt. He put his shiny hat on the seat opposite, the toy in his hat, and allowed the wind, as the train jogged on through a landscape coloured as for the daintiest of comedies, to fan him.

Little knick-knack rearward lawns and gardens of little houses peeped up between trees. He had glimpses of young women lying in hammocks, of old men spraying rose-trees.

“ Ay,” he murmured, as the train drew up at the station, and he put the toy in his left breast pocket, gently stroked his hat and put it on his splendid head, the auburn nimbus of which was ruffled by the wind, “ I expect he is in the real world now. Real world ? Which is the real world ? ”

When he alighted from his carriage he saw Miss Winter lurch out of one ahead and walk toward the exit.

“ Poor woman,” he considered. “ The journalistic life is hard for women. It takes the stuffing out of them.”

He made up on her ; and her face, as he drew level, horrified him—she was so pale. She looked at him, unseeing.

“ You are ill, Miss Winter,” he said.

“ Oh, it is you, Mr Wild ! No—yes—I am not very well.”

They came into the road.

“ Let us have a taxi,” said he, in a coaxing or paternal tone.

“ I—I should be glad of one. I feel so tired.”

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She advanced toward the first, but he said : “ No, please ; let us take the last—not for scriptural reasons—but because it is yellow.”

“ You must take the first, sir,” said the cab rank man.

“ *Must ?* ” said Wild. “ My friend, there is no such word. All these other taxis are non-existent to me—I don’t want a taxi.”

“ Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought——”

“ I want a yellow taxi. Only to fools is there any similarity. You might as well compare buttercups and butter beans. I want a yellow taxi, not a taxi.”

He had it too. Ruth stepped in, smiling wanly, and he followed.

“ You’ve had a tiring day,” said Wild.

Ruth lay back and nearly wept.

“ I’ve been trying to find a furniture dealer in Tottenham Court Road and they’ve removed, or absconded, or I don’t know what ; and I’ve been sent on all sorts of wild-goose chases.”

Wild drew erect and stretched forth his arm and curved his wrist and held firmly the ivory head of his jet cane.

“ What was the name of the firm ? ” he asked lightly.

“ Paton & Davis,” she said.

He drew forth, from his right inner pocket, his pocket-book, and from it a card, and read : “ James Paton (recently of Tottenham Court Road). Old furniture ; candlesticks ; choice collection of bric-à-brac.”

“ This,” said he, presenting it, “ appears to be one half of the firm at anyrate.”

“ Oh ! Oh ! Oh ! It is the half that I want ! ” Ruth carolled.

“ I told you that the yellow car had virtue,” said he, seeing that she looked as if she might break down.

“ Deus ex machinâ ! ” she said, and Wild took the title without any arrogance, but with a bow that was as much of thanks to his gods for guidance, as of thanks to her for her speech.

“ How,” she said presently, “ did you happen to have this ? ” holding the card.

“ Oh, purely accidental ! ” he said, with an elegant gesture of his grey-gloved hand. Then suddenly he said : “ No, not accidental. I have been in London with an aim, a purpose. I have been upon a quest. I had an idea. I thought I might discover John Brough’s address if I found the shop where he sold his furniture. I have been looking for it all day. Of course I did not find it ; but I found Mr

Paton." He pointed to the card in Ruth's hand. "I had a great time with him. He is a man of a remarkable——"

"But he has Mr Brough's address!" cried Ruth. "That's why I wanted to find him."

Wild dropped his hands on his knees.

"What a —— fool I am!" he said. "Every way round!" he added.

And Mrs Winter, hearing the motor stop before the gate, looked out and, with horror, thinking of the neighbours (her hopes for Ruth, and Doris, and Wild, that had been awakened a day or two ago weighing none), beheld Ruth gently laying her head upon Mapleton Wild's shoulder.

But the explanation was that Ruth, after a hopeless day, visited at the end by Hope, had fainted.

Mapleton Wild told no one whose name it was that she murmured at that moment, no more than Miss Royston confided to anyone the name that John Brough had spoken in similar circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIX : APPLE-BLOSSOM

A LEAN man was painting apple-tree stems in an orchard of the irrigated lands beyond Cultus.

He had come to Cultus over six months ago with an ex-soldier for partner. The ex-soldier was working now at the Yale Columbia Lumber Company's camp between Shushwap and Notch Hill. The lean man had gone into partnership on the spot, in a rather curious way.

He was sitting waiting for something to turn up, and sunning himself the while, on the verandah of the Cultus Hotel. He was in a high frame of mind, taking no anxious thought for the morrow, what he should eat, what he should drink, or what he should put on ; for it is easier to follow the splendid and simple advice of the Galilean dreamer in the Dry Belt of British Columbia than in London town. A regret he had, a very deep regret. But at least he had not bored the woman he loved, as Blandley, he considered, had bored Miss Wilson. Even in his loneliness he thanked God that he was not as that man, thanked the great and quiet God of the Dry Belt, whose mar-

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vels are on every side there—scent of sage-brush, yellow and green of the rolling sandhills, shouting of the Thompson River, now high, now low, as the wind rises and falls.

As he sat waiting for something to turn up an elderly gentleman sat down beside him and they fell into conversation.

“ You have recently arrived, sir,” said the elderly man. “ You are new to the country, are you not ? ”

The lean-faced man explained that he had passed through the country years before, across prairie and through mountain from Halifax to Seattle.

“ May I ask your calling, sir ? ” asked the elderly one.

The other pondered.

“ I am a journalist,” he said.

“ There is no newspaper here,” said the elderly man. “ And I cannot see that there is much news.”

“ Are murder trials and divorces news ? ” asked Brough.

The elderly man looked with increasing interest upon the lean one.

“ Strange what diverse men come to this land,” said he. “ I used to be a librarian in the Old Country.”

“ Health broke down ? ”

“No; heart broke down. I might as well have been an assistant in a drug store, or an itinerant indecent photographer merchant. I was talking to a gentleman the other day on this very verandah and he told me that he used to be a tailor in Glasgow. ‘We used,’ said he, ‘to be sartorial artists. Now we are slop-suit caricaturists.’ Then there was a ship’s captain came along with a steam-shovel to scoop out the embankment over there. He came to the hotel here for a gin-sling and he told me why he was in this country, captain of a steam-shovel instead of a ship. ‘There used,’ said he, ‘to be seamen and navigators; now there are only waiters with sea-legs and hotel hosts in nautical garb, and floating hotels or floating storage cellars.’ ”

He turned and looked at Brough again.

“Only once in all my experience as a librarian,” said he, “had I a bookman’s pleasure. And I don’t think it is an extravagant idea that the pleasures of a librarian should be bookish pleasures. I remember it well: one day a sailor asked, in my library, for—what think you?”

“I don’t know,” said Brough.

“Well, he asked for Maundeville’s ‘Voyages.’ For an ordinary seaman to ask for Maundeville’s ‘Voyages——’ ”

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Brough finished the sentence for the librarian :

“ It’s about as queer,” he suggested, “ as if he had asked for John Donne’s ‘ Sermons.’ ”

The ex-librarian jumped in his chair.

“ He did—as a matter of fact,” he cried. “ How queer that you should say that. You, too, are a reader, sir. And what else do you think he asked for ? You might have a guess now seeing that—— Guess ! ” he ended abruptly.

“ Well, now, let me see,” said Brough, inwardly bubbling, outwardly suave. “ Let me see. Say—say—say Jeremy Taylor.”

The librarian leaped again and turned inquiringly, and a hope dawned in his shattered heart—not yet rejuvenated by the Dry Belt air.

“ Is your name—— What is your name ? ”

“ John Brough.”

“ Oh, my dear God ! I have found the sailor ! ” cried the ex-librarian.

The bar tender, looking out, considered that presently the two would be coming in to “ celebrate ” something.

The ex-librarian (Sam Webb) and Brough joined forces and purchased an apple orchard.

“ I am afraid,” said Webb, after they had concluded all the purchase ceremony with the former

owner, who had fallen sick of restlessness and wanted to go to the Klondyke, "I am afraid that the world must always be under the dominion of progress. In coming here we have merely chosen to be happy, aiding progress instead of being sad suffering from it. The next generation here will have no place to fly to."

"Who knows? They may fly to Mars," said Brough.

"Or become supermen," said Webb, laughing.

"Who knows?" said Brough. "Only a very few of the world's inhabitants (in Northern Nigeria) still have tails."

Mr Webb stroked his beard.

"By the way," said Brough, "I think we had better decide to consider, for eight hours daily, only the cultivation of apples. I have it on my conscience that a friend of mine lost his business through preferring to talk about ethics with me to attending to the business."

"What was his business?" asked Webb.

"Furniture and linoleum. He grew careless of realities and his partner was thus enabled to rob him while he discussed eternity with me."

"Our partnership is different," said Webb.

"True," said Brough. "Indeed I see no reason

why we should not discuss the things that matter eagerly, and sell apples casually."

Brough was painting the tree stems one day when up through the still air came the rikitiki-riketiki of a velocipede rattling nearer on the railway track.

It was not the hour when the young man who looked over the trestles on that section was wont to pass. It was not the time for the young man who carried the music lady along the track to teach a ranchman's children.

He looked downhill and had glimpses, between the foam of blossom and these gnarled stems, of the velocipede coming round a curve.

"It must be the music lady after all," he decided.

A lady was sitting behind the man who propelled the velocipede.

He went on with his painting.

Then there came from the track, just below, the long slackening "R-R-R r-r-r-r-r" of the velocipede stopping.

"There he is right there, ma'am. Hi! Hi! Mr Brough! A young lady to see you. Don't you go up, ma'am. It's a scramble."

John set down the paint-pot and came down the slope. The "young lady" was scrambling up. She

was in white muslin, white as the apple foam. She scrambled up the hill so that he only saw the top of her hat ; but his heart went a-jumping.

She looked up, and he slid down towards her.

She gave a cry of " John ! My John ! " and she ran into his arms.

" —— ! " a blasphemy exploded below and a frantically quick " R-R-R-R-R-R ! " followed as the man who had brought Ruth up on the velocipede swept round the bend on it, to stop there " by heck, boys," as he said in Cultus that night, " for a good half-hour. It was a touching sight that ; and I reckon any gentleman would have gone around the bend."

Brough could not understand why Ruth cried. It seemed the silliest proceeding imaginable. He wanted to throw his paint-pot up and paint the sun.

He wanted to whoop.

He certainly did not want to cry.

" If you hadn't been here I should just have—cried—sat down and wept," said Ruth.

" My God—I mean my dear ! You're crying now. And I'm here."

" Oh, I know ; but I'm so happy."

Brough lifted his hat from his head and said :

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"I wish I could make you seem so. You look as if you were—I don't know!—sad, I think."

She laughed and he looked at her amazed and anxious.

"I wish you would tell me if I can do anything for you, Ruth. What should a man do when a woman—— You're laughing at me!"

She stopped crying. She stopped laughing.

"I only received your letter fourteen days ago," she explained. "It had been mislaid. I'll explain how later. That's side-issue. And I have an apology to deliver from Mapleton Wild. I received your letter fourteen days ago. It made me ill."

"Ill!"

"Because I didn't know where you were. I've had rheumatic fever——"

"Rheumatic fever? This is just the place for you, then, this Dry Belt."

"Yes—everything is for good, I believe. Oh, let me take off my hat and feel this air. Everything's for good. The doctor came to see me. Mother sent for him the night I got your letter. I didn't tell her what was wrong with me. The doctor suggested change of air. I only wanted morning to come so that I could go out and find Mr Paton. The doctor suggested change of air. He suggested Egypt. I

said I couldn't afford Egypt. He said one of the Dry Belts in America. 'Now in Colorado,' and he paused to purse his lips, you know the way doctors do, 'or B.C.,' he said, not 'British Columbia'—just 'B.C.,' the way you spoke in the pigeon-loft."

"Pigeon-loft. Yes. Pigeon-loft. Oh, this is——"

"When you told me where you would go if you were——" She caught his shoulder. "You weren't broken, were you?"

"I'm healed now. Go on—go on," said Brough.

"I remembered then. I had tried before but couldn't. I had looked at maps and couldn't spot it. I remembered then—Cultus, B.C. Oh, I wanted to come then. All my intuition told me to come. It was awful. I never ran after you!" she broke out suddenly. "I mean, I never made links between us. Even when you mentioned Hastings in the loft I never said I was a little girl there."

"Why not? Were you?"

"Oh, I—I'll explain all later. One can have space here to explain things with clarity—after I get a wash."

"You found Paton——"

"Yes—after—after I felt sure you were here. He had moved."

“ Yes ; I know. I worried and wondered——”

“ Oh,” she cried. “ You know Emerson’s ‘ Be at rest from seeking after your destiny ; your destiny is seeking after you.’ Do tell me—do tell me—what was the great speech you wanted to make to me. In the letter, you remember, you said——”

“ I’m afraid,” said Brough, “ that now you’re here it sounds very, very puny.”

“ Never mind. I’m only a wee body, and ‘ curious ’ is a puny word to express how I want to hear.”

“ It was only to say to you that, if you had been Helen, Troy would have broken in flower instead of flame, and all the course of the ages would have been different.”

Ruth did not think it puny. She felt humble again.

“ I must try to be worthy of that, John,” she said.

Mrs Webb’s voice came from the top of the crest :

“ Mr Brough ! Mr Brough ! Oh ! Oh ! I’ve been cleaning in your shack and I’ve let your luggage fall and smashed it.”

John turned to Ruth.

“ It’s all right, dear. I brought out with me nothing to speak of but a little porcelain figure. They call it my luggage.”

To the invisible Mrs Webb he shouted :

“All right, Mrs Webb. You will see something better presently.”

The rattle of the velocipede sounded and Ruth and John looked downhill.

The man who had pumped the velocipede up here with Ruth was sitting on his machine at the foot of the knoll. He looked up, not in their direction, but at the sweep of the sky opposite, as if shouting to a loon that just then circled, with its haunting cry, down to the Thompson River.

“Say, Mr Brough!” he hailed. “Is the lady coming back to-night? It’s close on sundown.”

“No! She’ll stay, Tom. We’ll put her up here. Mrs Webb will see——”

“I should like a wash——” said Ruth.

“All right,” came the voice from the foot of the hill. “Will I bring up your grips for you, ma’am, after the freight goes through?”

“If you please—for I’m going to stay.”

And stay she would, until the inevitable happened—until Brough and she discovered that the only way to make a fruit-farm pay was to sell it. The last owner had much less gone to the Klondyke than run away from the fruit-farm. But we know enough of Brough (and presumably of his partner in this latest folly) to know that, when that inevitable happened,

they would not sell the place, as a success, for double what it cost them, but for half of what it cost them, as a dubious possession in so far as the ostensible reason for possessing it went. Brough could never look upon a fruit-farm except as a fruit-farm ; he had neglected to nurture that part of him that might have seen it as a speculation in land, decorated with apple-blossom. Such was Brough's way. And no man can say he was unhappy. He was of those who always come up smiling, albeit thoughtful ; for whom the dawns are always full of expectation and the sunsets full of promise.

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